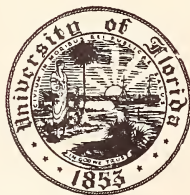


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who—to use his own words about Yeats—

“will never be anything less than a great man.”

# THE EXPERIMENTS O

ST MARTIN'S PRESS, NEW YORK

SEAN O'CASEY

*Robert Hogan*

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*Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 60-13873*

*Printed in the United States of America*

*by H. Wolff, New York*



# Preface

Whatever measure of insight or vitality this book possesses must be attributed largely to the criticism of several of my friends, colleagues and teachers, especially Professor Donald B. Clark of the University of Missouri, Professors Leon T. Dickenson and Donovan Rhynesburger of the University of Missouri, Professor Sven Eric Molin of Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Professor Robert C. Brown of Southeastern Louisiana College, and Messrs. Frederick Candelaria and Ron Ayling who gave me encouragement when I most needed it. I owe a similar debt to the patience of my wife and the bemused tolerance of my children who refrained, for the most part, from putting peanut butter in the typewriter. And, of course, this book would have been much less substantial than I hope it is without the equally courteous co-operation, comment, and disagreement of Mr. Sean O'Casey, who was unfailingly generous in giving time to answer my frequently obtuse questions, in furnishing me with much information, and in loaning me the manuscript of *The Drums of Father Ned*, first for perusal and later for production.

Portions of this book have appeared in slightly altered form in *The Dublin Magazine* and *The New Republic*.

I wish to thank the Research Committee of Ohio University for funds to aid in the preparation of an earlier version of the manuscript.

And, finally, I wish to thank God that this book is finished.

R.G.H.

Lafayette, Indiana  
September, 1959

Criticism is of two kinds: the critic may tell the reader what he so beautifully thinks about it all, or he may try to explain the form in which the literature is written. This book attempts the latter task.

*H. D. F. Kitto*

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Macmillan & Co. Ltd., *The Flying Wasp* and *Collected Plays* by Sean O'Casey, and *W. B. Yeats* by Joseph Hone.

The Macmillan Company, *Collected Plays* by Sean O'Casey.

The Macmillan Company, and Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd., *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, edited by Allan Wade.

The New York Times, for comments by Sean O'Casey that appeared in *The Times* on March 20, 1934 and October 21, 1934.

Oxford University Press, Inc., and Chatto & Windus Ltd., *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, by Raymond Williams.

Putnam & Co. Ltd., *Lady Gregory's Journals*, edited by Lennox Robinson.

The Times Publishing Co. Ltd., for Charles Morgan's review of "The Silver Tassie" in *The Times* of October 12, 1929.

THE EXPERIMENTS OF SEAN O'CASEY



# 1

## THE EXPERIMENTS OF SEAN O'CASEY

It is perhaps presumptuous for an American to attempt to lecture on an Irishman, but leafing through back issues of the unfortunately defunct *Dublin Magazine* one day I chanced upon Patricia Baggett's interesting article, "Sean O'Casey's Development of a Basic Theme," and read this comment:

These later plays are boring. They have none of the vitality of the earlier search for truth—for a meaning to existence. O'Casey has found truth, his meaning for existence, in some colour called red . . . he neither enlightens nor entertains his audiences—he offends their intelligence . . . And perhaps too this is the reason why O'Casey himself exploits the expressionistic technique in a more spectacular manner. He has to sell his plays. He has no new themes. Instead of new themes, he presents new combinations.

This statement seems to me such a convincingly presented example of false reasoning, indeed of an entirely false way to regard literature, that I would like to register a strong protest and, I hope, in the process refute a few other ingrained misconceptions clinging about one of Ireland's great writers.

Miss Baggett's explanations of the failure of O'Casey's later dramas rest upon a thesis that art is primarily didactic. When the artist ceases to grow philosophically, his work becomes less artistic. I would not want to deny that there is an occasional correlation between the writer as artist and the writer as moralist. However, I would like to point out that the theme of a work may often suggest a sensitive feeling and insight while the work itself may be execrable. One of the most popular poems in America is Joyce Kilmer's "Trees." Few people would deny the validity of the poet's emotion or that the emotion could be well embodied in a poem. However, the expression of "Trees" is so confused and banal that even as tree-starved a person as I, who live in an antenna jungle, must admit that the poem is quite negligible. Therefore, it is a mistake for Miss Baggett to criticize O'Casey because "never once does he present a picture of the future kingdom." He does not need to. A work of art is not a moral tract, and a dramatist is not a philosopher. The work of O'Casey or that of any artist, if it is not blatantly immoral or inhuman (in which case it defeats itself), must be judged on artistic grounds rather than on philosophical. This is the proper battleground, the one on which I would be delighted to meet Miss Baggett, and it is a battle which she seems to assume she has already won, although to my mind it is a battle which has never been fought.

And, although I am not as hypnotized by form as the more fervent followers of James or Joyce, when I consider the stale state of the modern drama I can not see much wrong with presenting "new combinations."

Miss Baggett is one of the latest of a long line of critics, from James Agate to Eric Bentley, who have condemned the later plays, three-fourths of the dramatist's productive life, out of court as a formless and erratic mishmash, as debilitated as they are illuminated by genius. "I regard,"

wrote Mr. Agate, "the whole of the later Sean O'Casey as pretentious twaddle." "Mr. O'Casey," lamented Mr. Bentley, "is not improving." Perhaps it is an occupational hazard for drama critics to condemn to a sub-sub inferno any deviations from the dramatic form of *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, for how otherwise can one explain the grudging half-applause for O'Casey? For years, two of his early plays have been shunted into the pigeonhole labeled "Classic, Early-modern," where they could be comfortably ignored. Indeed, not only have *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars* been ignored to the extent of misunderstanding their intention and form, but also their author has been dismissed as a primitive with negligible knowledge of dramatic technique.

To refute this antique misconception, I wish someone would make the assertion, backed up with a more serious critical consideration and a more careful close reading than this little book gives, the assertion fifteen or twenty years overdue, that O'Casey has written plays just as good as *Juno and The Plough*. *Purple Dust* and *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* and *The Drums of Father Ned* are neither erratic nor formless nor mishmash, and one will never discover their form by complaining that they don't resemble *The Plough and the Stars*. They weren't meant to. O'Casey wrote, "If critics . . . were lads of judgment and sense, they would never have criticized THE BISHOP'S BONFIRE, by comparing it with the earlier plays; for this play is of another method and manner, a different genre."

Drama critics, myself included, have perennially been shiftless, dense, incompetent, argumentative, pompous, self-appointed Brahmins, but, while the elder breed at least took notice that Ibsen was a poor wretch, the modern practitioners have added the invaluable quality of deafness to their vocational blindness. O'Casey has, for the past quarter of a century, written in articles and books and in

the newspapers of London and New York and Dublin that he is an experimental dramatist. "Dramatists cannot go on imitating themselves, and, when they get tired of that, imitating others. They must change, must experiment, must develop their power, or try to, if the drama is to live." Surely that injunction should sufficiently indicate that these later plays must be freshly evaluated, and that their intentions and merits will never be uncovered by the blunt scalpel that worked so delightfully well on *Time Out for Ginger*. In one of his letters, D. H. Lawrence wrote, "Tell Arnold Bennett that all rules of construction hold good only for novels which are copies of other novels. A book which is not a copy of other books has its own construction, and what he calls faults, he being an old imitator, I call characteristics." The rule applies equally well to plays, but neither the sniping pinprick of an Agate nor the lyric effusion of the *New York Times* critic defines characteristics or indicates the nature of the bewildering technical dexterity and the bold formal experimentation of O'Casey's last dramas.

Bentley comments of O'Casey that "a playwright without a theatre is far too free." Not so. A critic confined to a realistic peephole is far too circumscribed. O'Casey, divorced from the voyeurism of the proscenium arch, has tacked toward freedom, toward smashing the conventions inherited from Sardoodledom and the least fruitful facet of Ibsen. In the face of the impassive stolidity of the modern theater, O'Casey's strident innovations are both isolate and refreshing. Here, at last, is a dramatist attempting what the poets Pound and Eliot and the novelists Joyce and Woolf twenty or thirty years ago accomplished—the invention of new forms to interpret our time. Yet, as Shaw quipped, the theater is the last institution to change, and we slight Strindberg and Wedekind and O'Casey because they do not, like Priestley and Van Druten and Rattigan, write in



tidy packages or because their experiments are not leavened with the titillating perversity of Tennessee Williams or the boozy affability of Saroyan.

What critics call O'Casey's formlessness is not the aimless sprawling of a talented amateur, but experiments with form and, in the last plays, experiments in synthesis, in the juxtaposition of techniques from different genres. O'Casey's later plays have not lack of form, but the tremendous formal complexity of one of the few still growing and experimental talents of the modern theater.

O'Casey's alleged formlessness is supposed to derive from his long absence from connection with a theater and by divorce from his source of inspiration in Dublin. "Because," the argument goes, "O'Casey lives in Devon, he writes undramatic plays." Although the charge is patently absurd, it has been so vociferously reiterated that it has practically congealed into dogma.

When O'Casey broke with the Abbey Theatre, he had not, in the words of Yeats, "reduced the world to wall-paper"; *The Silver Tassie* had "no consuming dramatic fire." The question is, however, who was the better judge of "consuming dramatic fire"—the author of *The Plough and the Stars* or the authors of *The Shadowy Waters*, *Spreading the News*, and *The Clancy Name*? The answer, of course, to whether O'Casey's plays are undramatic can best be proved in the theater, but the charge that absence from connection with a theater necessitates a loss of dramatic sense is ridiculous theorizing. Chekhov had no close connection with the Moscow Art Theatre and, indeed, thought that Stanislavsky consistently misinterpreted his plays. No one had a closer connection with the Abbey than Yeats, yet this connection can scarcely be said to have made his own plays more dramatic. One of the masterpieces of Henri Becque went begging five years for a theater while even the most awkward work of the pro-

lific Zola commanded a showing. It is not the dramatist who needs the theater. He can afford to wait. The theater needs the dramatist and in these dreary days needs him sorely. The burden of proof is not upon the artist, but upon the theater. O'Casey wrote in *The Green Crow*, "Be sure, buttie, that though the British stage neglected the dramatist, the dramatist didn't neglect the British stage; though Broadway turned her back on him, the dramatist didn't, hasn't, won't turn his back on Broadway." The argument is succinctly summed up, as many dramatic arguments are, by Eric Bentley:

And yet we don't really know whether *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* is good theatre, bad, or indifferent, because we haven't tried it. There is also the question of how good the theatre is in which it would be tried. A creative ensemble would be more interested in tackling a work that is not tied down by the habits of past performances, a work which demands, and will help to form, a new kind of performance. Where are the actors who will give us, not repetitions, nor even revivals, but discoveries? Do we reject O'Casey because as a communist he is beneath us or because as an artist he is beyond us?

Since Mr. Bentley wrote, we have tried *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, but we still don't know whether it is good theater because "Where, oh where are the actors who will give us discoveries?" In this same season of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* the Actors' Studio, however, has given us a brilliant *Shadow of a Gunman*, and as I write this I have a letter on my desk from O'Casey mentioning the success of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* at the Edinburgh Festival and its imminent opening in London. Now that O'Casey is beginning to receive belated attention we may hope that these later plays

will have the intelligent and inimitable interpretation they deserve and demand.

What are the later plays? What are O'Casey's intentions? Briefly, his intentions would seem to be the destruction of dramatic realism. It is something of a paradox that the reigning convention of the modern theater should be realism although the greatest modern dramatists in their greatest plays are not realists. Perhaps the subtle influence of the film is responsible, and perhaps it is easier to understand the Ibsen of *The Pillars of Society* than the Ibsen of *The Master Builder*. Whatever the reason, despite Ibsen and Chekhov and Strindberg, despite Hauptmann and Wedekind, despite Pirandello and Lorca and Fry and Eliot and Shaw and Brecht and Beckett, despite Expressionism, Symbolism, Monodrama, the Ubermarionette, the Living Newspaper, the Epic Theatre, and, for that matter, despite *Oklahoma* and *South Pacific*, this is the age of theatrical realism. Today's theatrical growth is from *Murder in the Cathedral* to *The Cocktail Party*, from poetry to prose. O'Casey, who has never attempted to come to terms with theatrical convention, has progressed from prose to poetry.

There is nothing wrong with dramatic realism. It has, like other methods, advantages and limitations. The error is that the limitations of dramatic realism should be mistaken for the limitations of the drama and that the excellences of dramatic realism should be regarded as the only excellences of the drama.

O'Casey's work, however, has tended in the direction of freedom, of breaking down the forms and conventions of dramatic realism. He cries with Shaw that there are no rules, but this statement should be taken probably as one of narrow polemic against realism, rather than as a broad statement of dramatic theory. In his early plays O'Casey

was thought to be a realist of erratic and primitive genius, a dramatist of great original talent who, if he learned to harness and control his structure, would produce quite overpowering plays. *The Silver Tassie* and the subsequent plays, however, indicated the dramatist was getting too big for his britches, was setting himself up as an intellectual and a member of the avant garde, was throwing discipline out the window, whimsically dissipating his meager power in the slough of Expressionism and perversely biting the pale and poetic hand that fed him from the door (back door probably) of the Abbey Theatre.

Actually the early plays, like the later ones of Chekhov, seemed slovenly in form and slipshod in structure only because they were not based on the four-point traditional structure of *Protasis*, *Epitasis*, *Catastasis*, and *Catastrophe* which, under various pseudonyms, have been chewed over by critics from Donatus to Scaliger to Dryden to the latest composer of a "How to Write a Play" textbook. The early plays are far from structureless, but have a structure akin to *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Alchemist*. From the beginning, then, O'Casey was straining against the confines of realism and by the poorly understood success of *The Plough and the Stars* reasserting the vitality of this second structure with its unique utilization of tragic irony and its broadness of scope that the conventional, four-point, single-action plays of his contemporaries denied.

Perhaps the chief device of the second structure is the ironic juxtaposition of the comic and the pathetic or the grotesque and the sublime, a juxtaposition practiced also by Jonson, Chekhov, Congreve, Charlie Chaplin, and Clifford Odets. In *The Silver Tassie*, however, O'Casey utilized ironic juxtaposition in a new way. In addition to the juxtaposition of the farcical scene with the melodramatic within the same act, O'Casey juxtaposed acts in different

manners: the first act written in his old heightened realism and containing the usual farcical, satiric, melodramatic, and pathetic contrasts; the second act entirely Expressionistic; the third somber, with occasional intervals of farcical lightness; the last with almost complete grimness marching symbolically to its tragic conclusion. The play is a strange and vivid *mélange* of methods whose potentialities have never been fully plumbed.

From this extreme sophistication, O'Casey turned his attention fully to Expressionism, writing two plays, *Within the Gates* and *The Star Turns Red*, in a uniformly stylized manner. In these plays, by his own statement, O'Casey attempted to reintroduce in an integral manner the song and dance which the drama since Ibsen had been bereft of. Flamboyance has just about been lost save in the dying form of the opera. Emotion on the modern stage has tended to understatement, to suppression, to implication, the expressive gesture, the symbol, the glance, the innuendo. *Savoir vivre*, the vitality and the raving have been lost. Realism, thought O'Casey, was dying of over-civilization, and he intended at any cost to revive it.

O'Casey's later use of Expressionism has been exaggerated by Miss Baggett and other critics. O'Casey wrote two completely Expressionist plays: *Within the Gates*, an expression of the artist's own world view, and *The Star Turns Red*, a proletarian drama, hewing closely to the party line. *Gates* is the better play and certainly technically challenging and provocative. The play yet seems to me too diffuse, as if the author had strayed too far from reality and characterization and had tried to include too much. I think the two Expressionist plays are O'Casey's worst; however, both Miss Baggett and O'Casey think highly of *Gates*, and O'Casey's sense of the drama seems to me one of the century's best, so I shall, for the present, hold my tongue.



O'Casey has expressed doubts about *The Star Turns Red*. Fulfilling the doctrine of social realism enunciated by Gorki for proletarian literature forces O'Casey to contrive his most thematically explicit play. The line between the Morality play and Expressionism is a thin one which I do not intend to attempt to draw here, but I would indicate that O'Casey has several times voiced his dislike of *Everyman*.

*The Star Turns Red* is one limit of Expressionism, and in subsequent plays like *Red Roses for Me*, having evidently learned the dangers of extreme abstraction and explicit presentation, O'Casey used Expressionism only as a contributory tool that was combined with several others. In *Red Roses* the dramatist's romanticism re-emerged in the character of the idealized young poet, Ayamonn. Here, O'Casey has shifted his message rather than repeated himself as Miss Baggett avers. His theme is the result of personal insight, rather than the group insight of an economic creed or a religious dogma. Structurally, *Red Roses* is O'Casey's queerest experiment. Its truncated and often implied action, like a sort of squashed Ibsenism, coupled with the various tones and juxtaposed viewpoints he had previously utilized, combine to form a sometimes static although frequently exciting drama. The curious third act is the writer's closest approach to the lyric drama, but, while the second act of the *Tassie* had attempted to portray war by an emanation of the mass psyche, the third act of *Red Roses* plumbs the individual mind of Ayamonn and attempts to re-enforce the play's theme vertically, in depth, rather than horizontally through progressive action.

After *Red Roses* the lyric and Expressionistic elements are not separated from the more realistic by exclusion to a separate act, but they are fused more or less integrally into a whole composed of slices of farce, melodrama,

heightened realism, the bizarre, the ludicrous, and the fantastic. O'Casey's last five plays—*Oak Leaves and Lavender*, *Purple Dust*, *The Bishop's Bonfire* and *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* and *The Drums of Father Ned*—seem attempts to weld all the effects tested in the earlier plays harmoniously together. These plays all seem based on the principle of a variety of minute emotional contrasts, of melodrama forcibly conjoined with pathos or satire or farce, and of all the elements succeeding each other with bewildering complexity. Increased familiarity with the plays on the printed page makes to me only increasingly absurd the charge that these are the products of a jumbled and orderless artistry. I become only more impressed by the subtle dexterity of a kaleidoscope of different and successfully merged emotions and of startling effects. As one example let me cite the astonishing distance which O'Casey gets out of melodrama in the last act of *The Bishop's Bonfire*, especially in the scene between Manus and Foorawn and climactically in Foorawn's lines, "You ruffian! Oh, Manus darling, I think I'm dying."

I frankly admit that a close unraveling of the artistry of these plays, particularly the later ones, is a task I quail before. This book does not answer all of the pertinent questions about the plays. Indeed, it probably does not even raise most of the questions for the simple reason that they probably have not occurred to me. I have set myself in these chapters a straight and narrow path to tread and have allowed myself only briefly to diverge into a couple of its most fascinating byways. My approach to the plays is structural; it is a consideration of their form. A great artist is not content to work within a form, even within a form created by himself. Such a man must extend form, must create new forms, must explore, must discover new extensions and, by aiming distantly, occasionally fail and define limitations.



If I may be for a moment franker than is the usual wont of the crafty drama critic, I will tell you how successful I think my method is. On the early stages of my path, I think that it serves excellently and that I am able to lay down a firm road (probably cobblestoned) for later travelers to stroll on at their leisure and observe the many beauties and intricacies of the landscape that I have missed. In the middle of the journey the road becomes rougher and more winding, and in the latter stages it becomes full of bog holes and precipitous twists and finally lurches off into the swamp of windy rhetoric from which it may, I hope, somewhere emerge. To the structural critic, the later plays are unknown land. I hope that when my path diverges too wildly from sense that it may at least serve as a warning to those travelers who follow.

When structure began to fail me, I chose three bypaths, two of which may be suggestive to later critics. I include an introductory chapter on O'Casey's prose style as something to be examined rather than to be vaguely eulogized and compared to Elizabethan rhetoric. I have it in mind that someone could illuminate these later plays greatly by following this path as far as Reuben A. Brower did in the essay on *The Tempest* in his *The Fields of Light* or as Robert B. Heilman did in his book on *Lear, The Great Stage*. I include an introductory chapter on O'Casey's dramatic theory. This method is a somewhat oblique approach to the plays and has not always in the past—see Corneille's critiques, for instance—proved the most fruitful. Finally I include a factual appendix about *The Silver Tassie* controversy because I think it might be good for most of the important documents of that notable furor to be gathered in one handy place and because I enjoyed reading them.

Several pathways I have completely avoided. I say nothing or little about the themes of the plays, for I believe that

a successful work of art will be sufficiently clear and that an unsuccessful work of art may be. At any rate, the work should speak for itself. For similar reasons I say nothing about the delight and charm of the plays. Frequently I get myself embedded in generalizations about, to use a term O'Casey has chuckled at, "rude mechanicals." This synthesis of dramatic theory is grossly oversimplified, but, when I consider what a shambles my distinguished and subtle predecessors have left, I don't think that I can do much more harm. A better reason for generalizing is that we will be dealing with semi-subjective matters of aesthetic and of structure and that when one deals with the Masters, one must sometimes say, as H. D. F. Kitto does of Aeschylus, "For convenience, I speak here confidently; really Aeschylus is the critic's despair, because he would never write two plays alike. . . ."

Incidentally, there are no plot summaries because I find those things dull to read and duller to write.

Finally, to understand O'Casey's work, if not his genius, one must regard him as a conscious artist, whose art is not static, but evolving. The plays are many-faceted, kaleidoscopic. If I have caught briefly one of those shimmering surfaces and analyzed briefly its texture, that glance may help to illuminate the explorations in form and the mastery of language of the man who, like Shaw and O'Neill, has been one of the few vitally maturing artists of the drama since its renaissance in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

If I have not, the plays are there to speak for themselves.

## 2

### TRADITIONAL AND EXPERIMENTAL

I am not going to discuss O'Casey in this chapter. I am going to discuss and illustrate two types of play structure, so anyone to whom this information is elementary may skip over to Chapter III.

The first structure is a traditional one used by most plays since Aeschylus; the second is an experimental structure which might be called Chekhovian because Chekhov was the first person to use it fully and brilliantly. I am going to define, perhaps unnecessarily, traditional structure because when you know what it is, you may more easily understand and appreciate the second structure. I am going to define the second structure, perhaps at too great a length, because I don't think it has ever been well defined and because it is the structure not only of *Juno* and *The Plough* but also of *The Lower Depths*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Three Sisters*, *Heartbreak House*, *Awake and Sing!*, *Street Scene*, and even of such comic strips as *Bus Stop* and *Picnic*. I am going to illustrate the first structure with Ben Jonson's *Volpone* because I may assume most readers remember the plot of that play and because that play is one of the most perfect examples of traditional structure that I can find. I am going to illustrate the second structure with Anton Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* because it is an excellent example and because, although it is

less familiar, I am tired of reading about *The Cherry Orchard*.

There are many possible variations of the traditional structure as, for instance, the absence of *peripetia* or the truncated structure of a typical Ibsen play. I will ignore the variations and stick to the prototypical form, the structure which applies equally well to *Oedipus Rex* and to *Charley's Aunt*. Ben Jonson was demonstrably aware of the structure for he used its terminology in three of his plays, *The Magnetick Lady*, *The New Inn*, and *Everyman Out of His Humour*; however, Donatus and Scaliger and many other critics had already defined and refined his terms for him. If I may skip forward in time a bit, I will quote one of the most lucid definitions of the structure, John Dryden's from his *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*:

Aristotle indeed divides the integral parts of a play into four. First the *Protasis*, or entrance, which gives light only to the characters of the persons, and proceeds very little into any part of the action. Secondly, the *Epitasis*, or working up of the plot; where the play grows warmer, the design or action of it is drawing on, and you see something promising that it will come to pass. Thirdly, the *Catastasis*, or counterturn, which destroys that expectation, imbroils the action in new difficulties, and leaves you far distant from that hope in which it found you; as you may have observed in a violent stream resisted by a narrow passage,—it runs round to an eddy, and carries back the waters with more swiftness than it brought them on. Lastly, the *Catastrophe* which the Grecians called λύσις, the French *le denouement*, and we the discovery or unravelling of the plot: there you see all things settling again upon their first foundations; and, the obstacles which hindered the design or action of the play once removed, it ends with that resemblance of truth and nature, that the audience are satisfied with the conduct of it.

T. W. Baldwin, in his book *Shakspeare's Five-Act Structure*, suggests that Jonson arranged these four terms to conform with a five-act structure. For Jonson, the Exposition was Acts I and II, the Intrigue was Act III, the Counterturn Act IV, and the Denouement Act V.

Acts I and II comprise the Exposition. In Act I the main characters are introduced and characterized. We learn that Volpone is a crafty and greedy old man who feigns sickness to extort gifts from people who hope to profit by his death. We meet Mosca, the equally crafty servant, whom Volpone uses to carry out his plots, and we meet Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino who, hoping to trick Volpone, are themselves being tricked. Act I established the character, tone and atmosphere of the play; we know what to expect. The first scene of Act II introduces the chief characters of the sub-plot, principally Sir Politic Would-Be, and a secondary tone of lighter satire is introduced. We may expect that the sub-plot will be intruded into the main action whenever Jonson wishes to give the audience a respite from its ferocity or whenever he wishes to heighten the suspense of the main action by deferring briefly its course. Without the sub-plot, the atmosphere of *Volpone* would be unbearably intense, and even with the sub-plot the play has a much more vicious tone than drama can usually sustain. This typical Elizabethan device of the sub-plot was absent from the stark classic tragedies of Greece and from the French emulations of Corneille and Racine. Although it adds nothing to the progress of the main action, it performs a necessary function in plays like *Volpone* and its juxtaposition of an alien atmosphere will be even more important in the development of the second structure.

The last scenes of Act II introduce us to Celia and to Volpone's desire for her, and show the first stages of his plot to seduce her. The playwright has in the first two acts brought the action up to the point of greatest intrigue and



activity. The preliminary exposition, characterization, and massing of forces have all been revealed.

The center of any play is the Intrigue, a more specific term for what Aristotle simply called The Middle. The hero and the villain, or the protagonist and the antagonist if you prefer the older terms, engage in a struggle to foil each other. For instance, in the first scene of Act III, Mosca meets Bonario, the young lover, and Jonson gives us the beginning of the counteraction, that action which will foil the plot to seduce Celia. The remainder of the act is composed of scenes of intrigue which result in the success of the counteraction and the failure of Volpone's plot. Then, so that the act may end on an ominous note and that the audience may wonder what comes next, Act III ends with the villains hatching a second plot which will form the action of Act IV, the Counterturn or Reversal.

In the last scene of Act IV, the second intrigue succeeds. Bonario and Celia are taken into custody and Volpone is praised for having done a worthy service to the state. The Reversal allows the playwright to place the action at the most distant point from a happy conclusion, with villainy triumphant and innocence condemned. In a modern three-act play, incidentally, after the Exposition of Act I and the Intrigue of most of Act II, the Reversal then occurs at the end of the act, and the audience awaits the Denouement or Unraveling in the final act.

The last act, not only in *Volpone* but also in most traditional plays, is the most complex and frequently the duller. A traditional structure is rather like a modern detective story in which the explanations and unravelings are necessary but usually much more tedious than the earlier blood-stained carpets and locked rooms. Jonson, however, was a masterly plotter, and his unraveling is the most exciting and tense part of the play. The act is composed of about a dozen intricate plot reversals which indicate the momentary

waxing or waning of Volpone's fortunes, and I will direct you to the play to see how thick and fast they crowd upon each other. Jonson uses so many plot reversals to keep the audience constantly surprised because he well realized how slack the Denouement could frequently be.

Some of Jonson's plays, like his rather dull tragedies *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, are even more tightly classic and dispense with a sub-plot. But some of his other plays can give us an excellent transition to a discussion of the second structure. I have in mind first *Epicoene* which lacks a clearly defined Reversal and which has a welter of incident extrinsic to the main action. The fading of importance of the main action of the traditional structure is even more obvious in *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Alchemist*. In these plays, extrinsic incident becomes almost the *raison d'être* of their composition, and the main action is only a tenuous thread upon which diverse incidents may be hung. William Congreve's *The Way of the World* has, despite J. C. Trewin's comment that Congreve was a clumsy plotter, a similar welter of incident which only seemingly has little relation to a progressive action.

It would be possible to analyze the nature of the second structure by using a Congreve or a Jonson play, but a few modern dramatists have written plays cut from the same cloth. Chekhov and Clifford Odets have plays that will serve excellently and that contain many minor qualities characteristic of O'Casey. Indeed, the similarity of plays like *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Three Sisters*, and *Awake and Sing!* to *The Plough and the Stars* is so structurally remarkable that an analysis of one of them as a typical example of the second structure seems mandatory.

The misunderstanding of Chekhov's plays, from Stanislavsky's time to the present, rests chiefly upon the misunderstanding of whether the slender spine of progressive action that Chekhov leaves in the plays or the interaction of



the characters is of greater importance. Stressing progressive action, Stanislavsky wrote a fiery letter to Chekhov, announcing that *The Cherry Orchard* was not a comedy, as the author insisted, but a tragedy.

David Magarshack in the best book written on Chekhov's dramatic technique, *Chekhov the Dramatist*, disagrees with Stanislavsky, on the one hand, and those critics, on the other, who have insisted that a Chekhov play has little or no plot. He writes:

As for plot, it is not its absence but rather its complexity that distinguishes them, and the producer who fails to realise that simply cannot see the wood for the trees.

In insisting that all or most of the action is intrinsic, Magarshack denies (and I completely agree with him) the necessity of the progressive main action for every type of play. Such traditional plays have a sort of dramatic naïveté demanded by the rigorous selectivity of traditional plotting. Such plays have a narrow breadth of vision and roar grimly along their narrow track to their denouement. They invite the one-dimensional labels of melodrama, farce, comedy. When a writer like Euripides dares broaden Aeschylean tragedy with elements of humor or the exaggerated excitement of the thriller, the James Agates of Athens immediately, even then, bemoaned the deterioration of the drama.

A Chekhov play has a more inclusive breadth, subtler and more startling juxtapositions, and tremendously more complexity than most plays. If all of the action of a Chekhov play is of equal necessity, obviously a structural technique other than the structure of action is being used.

It might, then, be of strong pertinence to analyze one of the later plays of Chekhov to attempt to discern what type of structural unity it has. The structure of such plays

is considerably more intricate than that of a play with a progressive action plot. In a conventional play, the audience reacts emotionally to one series of causally connected events. In *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*, no one series of events is emphasized sufficiently to become a main plot. Catharsis in a Chekhov play occurs from a fusion of all of the individual actions. These different actions offer divergent points of view on a central problem and converge at the end of the play in a synthesis which embodies the author's intellectual purpose, his theme.

The characters in a Chekhov play are of two sorts: one is dynamic and actively participates in one of the plots, while the other is static and serves as foil to the dynamic character or sometimes motivates the dynamic character's actions.

There are two types of dramatic action in a Chekhov play. One consists of scenes in which a few characters, usually two, are onstage alone and in direct conflict. These duets advance the action of the different stories. Ensemble scenes present all or most of the characters onstage at the same time. These scenes serve as ironic commentary on the action, as receptacles to indicate theme, for exposition, and for characterization.

Perhaps the crux of Chekhov's technique is the use of irony that permeates and defines the form of these ensemble scenes. The seemingly verbose interludes on seemingly trivial subjects, that largely make up these scenes, and the frequent and abrupt changes of subject matter are actually neither pointless nor trivial. They function, as we shall see, rather like a Greek chorus, and we must distinguish between these choral scenes and those dynamic scenes between two or three people which develop the action. To understand the nature of the fusion that occurs at the end of a Chekhov play, we must further define and analyze the nature of the various individual actions

and of their relationships to one another. Some of these minor actions have a traditional plot, some have variations on a traditional plot, and some have a structure which can only be called narrative rather than dramatic.

*The Three Sisters* is, in many respects, Chekhov's most formal play. Magarshack is even able to find a formal chorus in the opening of the first act. He writes:

Indeed, the scenery of the first act of the play was conceived by Chekhov in the form of a Greek theatre: he divided the stage into two parts separated by a colonnade, the front part representing a drawing-room and the back part a dining-room. There are six characters in the opening scene, divided into two groups, each keeping to its own part of the stage, the three sisters in front of the columns and Chebutykin, Tusenbach and Solyony behind the columns. Their dialogue, too, is conducted in a sort of strophe and antistrophe manner.

The men's conversation forms ironic commentaries on the conversation of the sisters. When Olga says, "I felt such a longing to be back home!" Chebutykin says, "The devil you did!" and Tusenbach replies, "It's all nonsense, of course." When Olga cries, "Yes! To Moscow as soon as possible," Chebutykin and Tusenbach laugh. After Olga's next speech, Tusenbach says, "Really, you talk such a lot of nonsense, I'm tired of listening to you."

The men's conversation, sporadically emerging from the next room and acting as flippant and mocking commentary on the sisters' hopes, is the first indication of the play's pervasive irony and also suggests that there are at least two mutually exclusive modes of viewing reality in a Chekhov play. In *The Three Sisters*, the views are broadly represented by the optimistic idealism of Vershinin and the pessimistic realism of Chebutykin. The Elizabethan sub-plot is somewhat akin to this method, as it offers another di-

mension of reality, often comic, toward the main action which is often tragic. The sub-plot, however, was subordinate and scarcely ever assimilated in the main plot. Frequently it could even be excised from the play without significant harm to the main action. In *The Three Sisters* both views are equally necessary. Cut Chebutykin and there is no play.

These two views are exemplified by several plots: the desire of the sisters to go to Moscow, of Masha to escape from the misery of her marriage with Koolyghin by her love for Vershinin, of Irene to avoid marriage with Tusenbach, of Andrey to become a successful university professor and of Chebutykin to find meaning in life. Each desire is thwarted. Attached to these plots are the minor and opposing desires of the minor characters: Natasha's desire to rule, Soliony's desire to marry Irene, Tusenbach's desire to marry Irene and to find a meaning in life by work, Vershinin's desire for Masha and for a brave, new world, and Protopopov's desire to rise socially by infiltrating into the lives of Andrey and the sisters.

Despite at least one great ensemble scene in each act, there are a surprising number of duets. In Act I there are two, in Act II at least eight, in Act III five or six, in Act IV at least seven. This surprising number of at least twenty-two duets indicates two qualities of Chekhovian structure: the action is much more complete and complex than the action of a traditional structure, and Chekhov rarely uses a long dramatic scene developing a single action or topic, but short scenes, each one on a different topic. The ensemble scenes may even be broken up into a series of these short scenes.

Besides the duets and ensembles, there are at least two, and possibly three, uses of the chorus: at the beginning of Act I, at the end of Act IV, and possibly at Andrey's attempts to justify himself to the sisters at the end of Act III.

If Andrey's speech is not part of a chorus, it definitely is what we might call an aria. If a soliloquy is the speech of a character speaking his thoughts to himself at length, an aria is a formal or impassioned speech made to other characters onstage. Chekhov frequently uses both soliloquy and aria.

Three obvious uses of the soliloquy appear in the play, although, because Chekhov was writing in a realistic tradition, the soliloquies are not the formal ones we have become accustomed to in the Elizabethan drama. Instead, Chekhov attempts to present them as they might actually occur. Twice Andrey tells his thoughts at some length to the servant Ferapont, because there is security in Ferapont's deafness. As he is portrayed, it is plausible that Andrey would want to unburden himself to someone. Ferapont injects unrelated comments into the soliloquy, comments which are, as we might suspect, ironic commentaries on it. Once Chebutykin enters dazedly during the fire offstage and speaks at length to himself, unaware that there are others onstage.

The aria, although more formal, is more adaptable to a realistic tradition, and Chekhov makes understandably greater use of it than he does of the soliloquy. Vershinin, by the nature of his voluble idealism, has five arias, but Irene, Tusenbach, and perhaps Andrey also are allowed some long and impassioned speeches. The arias do not further the action, but set forth the opposed abstractions that will be synthesized into the theme at the end of the play.

Some of the minor techniques in the play, which O'Casey will also use, include the offstage sound and the appearance of the silent character who is separated from the other actors by the length or width of the stage. Each small bit of offstage or mute action has again its own ironic comment on the dialogue occurring in the center of the stage, and usually this business is the signal for a change in the



topic of conversation. Such business is a double-edged weapon of irony and simultaneously a method for breaking up the flow of sustained development or of fully realized action.

Having considered the technical devices of the play, we may conclude by noticing its general form. The form of the play is that of various inner actions—the Masha plot, the Irene-Tusenbach plot, the Olga plot, the Andrey-Natasha plot, and the Chebutykin plot—surrounded by or within the receptacle of a broad outer action which may be symbolized by the desire of the sisters and Andrey to go to Moscow and by the thwarting of that desire. The gradual resignation and the growing disillusionment and finally the acceptance of defeat imply more than disappointment about a life to be spent in the provinces; they imply the defeat of aspiration and idealism, a frighteningly grim theme.

Chekhov's play is more moving and more convincing than most traditionally structured plays. I find it more convincing than, let us say, *Hedda Gabler* which has a similar theme. The theme of Ibsen's play is worked out in terms of a single action, Hedda's fate. The theme of Chekhov's play is exemplified by five major plots and several attached minor ones. When Chekhov's five major characters all reach disillusionment by separate paths, the cumulative effect is overwhelming. When the tones of the five major plots—some pathetic, some melodramatic, some grotesquely humorous—are ironically juxtaposed against each other by Chekhov, their very differences suggest to the audience that the whole world has gone awry.

The suicide of Hedda, one person in a world of people who would not commit suicide, is not as convincing as the blasted psyches of a whole stageful of characters at the end of *The Three Sisters*. There is a strong possibility that the

audience of the Ibsen play will, in the face of all that entrenched "normality," dismiss Hedda as a psychotic and not identify with her sufficiently to feel the force of Ibsen's theme. After the documented and plausible failures of all of the major characters at the end of the Chekhov play, the audience cannot escape the meaningful fusion of all of the separate actions as they are gathered up and commented on by the final chorus, which is now depleted by Tusenbach's death. The force of Vershinin's arias about the brave, new world has been ironically destroyed by Tusenbach's death, by Chebutykin's moral disintegration, and by the inevitable and accepted future misery of the sisters and Andrey. The only triumphant characters are the evil ones—Natasha, Soliony, and the invisible Protopopov. What keeps the play from ending, as does *Gulliver's Travels* or *Timon of Athens*, in almost unbearable grimness is Chekhov's brilliant use of the chorus which is yet able with dogged conviction to assert, as does Faulkner, "They will endure."

This perhaps overlong discussion of *The Three Sisters* is needed to illustrate the scope, compression, and complexity of the second structure. These qualities are seldom attained by plays using the simpler, traditional structure. When they are attained, one has either a *tour de force* or a play which fights against its structure, like an Ibsen play, or manages partially to escape from its structural strait jacket. It is not uncommon for a talented amateur like R. C. Sherrieff or Mary Chase to write a successful traditional play. Neither an amateur nor a primitive could successfully cope with the second structure, for the success of such a play requires a great deal of conscious artistry and perhaps a touch of genius. The second structure is the most redoubtable attempt to escape the formidable and hallowed naïveté that has been traditionally the milieu of the



drama. With some knowledge of the second structure, we may now turn to *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars* with some confidence that we may now understand a little about their conscious artistry and touches of genius.

### 3

#### THE SECOND STRUCTURE

Lady Gregory, though O'Casey doesn't think so, made one of the shrewdest critical comments about his work when she wrote that his forte was character. O'Casey's early full-length plays, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock*, and *The Plough and the Stars*, are based on the second structure which can succeed only when there are deeply etched characters whose clashing and diverse viewpoints are fused out of irony into an emotionally permeated meaning.

Like Chekhov's plays, O'Casey's have been misinterpreted. Like Chekhov's plays, O'Casey's do not have the conventional, single-action structure, but have an exterior action, like Chekhov's saving the estate or going to Moscow, and a number of interior actions or plots which exemplify straightforwardly and ironically the major theme. In only one of his early plays does O'Casey attain the polished craftsmanship of Chekhov. In *The Shadow of a Gunman* and in *Juno*, O'Casey's use of the second structure is faulty. He seemed to be feeling his way and learning the nature, the potentialities and limitations, of his form. In these plays O'Casey employs characters demanded only by the mechanics rather than by the essence of the plot. This is a criticism that could not be leveled at traditional dramatists who are, of course, equally guilty of the crime.

For the traditional dramatist, such strategy is no crime but a necessity of the drama. The charge has pertinence only for the dramatist who attempts to make his play as subtle as a novel and who is willing to have his work subjected to that more rigorous criticism which is called literary rather than dramatic. The structure of *The Plough and the Stars*, however, is as artistically controlled as the best of Chekhov, with no more waste motion than one of the trinkets of that master mechanic Scribe.

The mark of a young dramatist is evident in O'Casey's initial attempt beyond the one-act form, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, which was first produced by the Abbey Theatre on April 9, 1923, and which has a prodigal use of undeveloped characters. Tommy Owens, Mr. Mulligan, Mrs. Henderson, and Mr. Gallogher appear in Act I, but not in Act II. Only Mrs. Henderson and Owens have some peripheral function in the offstage action of Act II. Chekhov would not have abandoned these characters, or, to be more precise, would not have used them at all. Mulligan and Gallogher, as foils to expedite the exposition, are wasteful, contribute nothing to the essence of the plot, and exist only because of mechanical exigencies. Maguire, who makes a one-page appearance,\* is essential, although, by using him so briefly and only as a lever to set the plot going, O'Casey does make him only the shadow of a gunman. Much nonessential incident is also included, mostly for technical reasons—to forward exposition or to provide a plausible motive for an exit—but occasionally whimsically. Whimsy and structure, as many of Saroyan's plays suggest, tend to blur a play's outlines.

The theme of the play concerns the difference between true and false bravery. The characters who are truly

\* For convenience I refer to pages to indicate duration. If there is not a great deal of stage business, a normal page of dialogue equals about a minute of playing time.

brave—Maguire, Minnie, Mrs. Henderson—are not talkers, but doers. Maguire has only three speeches; Minnie in the crucial second act has only four. The characters who are falsely brave—Davoren, Seumas, Grigson, Tommy—are all voluble braggarts.

The theme is presented with some mistaken emphasis because of a basic structural confusion. The first act is built upon the traditional structure while the second surprisingly branches out into the several actions of the second structure. Act I centers around Davoren, and the situation developed there demands a fulfillment relating principally to Davoren who should, by a personal catastrophe, discover that his attitude of Act I was wrong. In Act II, however, Davoren's action is joined by three others of equal importance. O'Casey seems to have found the structure of his most popular plays.

First, though, let us consider his handling of traditional structure in Act I. The first scene characterizes Davoren and Shields and plants Maguire. The short second scene with Maguire prepares for the complication of Act II. Scene iii is structurally a waste. The squabble between the landlord and Seumas is nonessential incident although the staccato dialogue is the only genuine dramatic clash of the first nine pages. It seems inserted to rejuvenate the play in somewhat the same manner as the assassins' apologies to the audience in *Murder in the Cathedral*. This intrusive scene further suggests that O'Casey will never be particularly at home within the confines of a structure that will not allow him occasionally to wander casually away from his plot.

Scene iv, a page long, provides essential exposition. Seumas' exit at the end of the scene, however, is weakly motivated, though O'Casey attempts to cover the weakness by a paragraph of mildly effective ranting. The weakness is again accentuated by Davoren's soliloquy before Minnie's entrance. Shaw comments in a review of Pinero that one

criterion of an effective dramatist is his management of entrances and exits. Here, at least, the playwright's manipulations are too nakedly evident.

The Minnie-Davoren scene is intrinsic to the first act by providing Davoren's motivation for accepting the title of gunman. The scene is structurally clever, with appropriate transitions to lead up to the crucial dialogue about the gunman. The transition to vi is considerably more effective than was Minnie's carelessly motivated entrance at the beginning of the scene. Tommy Owens' entrance, interrupting a kiss, is shrewd stagecraft, because nothing is quite so frequently deathly as a stage kiss, and also because few devices increase the tension of a play as well as a kiss deferred.

The seventh scene, the act's longest with ten pages, is comic, and its significance for the action is Davoren's ir-retrievable acceptance of the character of gunman. Gallogher and Mrs. Henderson's motivation here is almost farcical, and the scene's unnecessary incidents are prolonged so that a lack of proportion results.

Another indication of faulty craftsmanship is a stretching almost too far of the illusion of realistic time. Although this may seem a late date for an observance of the unities, O'Casey is dealing with reality more realistically than Ibsen usually did, and Ibsen scrupulously observed the illusion of real time equaling stage time.

The most glaring fault is the disparity between tone and structure of the two acts. Act I could be acted alone effectively as a realistic comedy. Having in Act II discarded the comic characters of Act I, O'Casey writes essentially a new play. The three pallid creations of I are replaced by the vivid, cowardly braggart, Adolphus Grigson, who is certainly O'Casey's first brilliant comic creation. Perhaps one reason for the lack of unity between the acts is that



O'Casey, from 1918 to 1924, had written only one-act plays.

Act II opens intensely and ominously. The frequent omens in Act II are a method, often ironic, to achieve tension even in a structure-of-action play—using “tension” in the sense of suspense as well as of structural cohesion. Act II contains both false and true omens. Davoren alludes to Maguire's bag, saying, “I hope there's nothing else in the bag, besides thread and hairpins.” Another omen, partially false, is Seumas' insistence that he hears tapping on the wall.

More important than true and false omens is the thematic dichotomy between true and false bravery that is continually underscored in Act II. “I wouldn't care to have me life dependin' on brave little Minnie Powell—she wouldn't sacrifice a jazz dance to save it.” But she does. The irony is continued by two clever pages in which Davoren and Seumas assert their bravery and philosophy. Both braveries are negated by the volley of shots which makes them both cower.

Besides the Seumas plot being elevated to an equal importance with Davoren's in the first scene, the Grigson plot comes to the fore in the second scene when Mrs. Grigson enters to give the necessary exposition about her husband. Only a young playwright would still be introducing important characters this late in the play.

The scene is followed by the false omen of Gallogher's letter to heighten the tension. When the letter is found and destroyed, the tension is maintained by the discovery of bombs in the suitcase.

After Minnie takes the suitcase to her room, the activity of the play occurs offstage. Although O'Casey's interest lies in the cowards onstage, the attention of the audience is constantly directed offstage. Davoren and Seumas are passive protagonists, and the problem of maintaining interest in a weak or passive hero is one of the most dramati-

cally difficult to solve. I think that O'Casey avoids that problem in this play and that his refusal to grapple with it weakens the play.

The climax occurs when the two cowards allow Minnie to take the bag, but the climax comes too early and is weakened by the number of exciting offstage events which are needed for the denouement but which only the minor characters participate in. When it is necessary for minor characters to carry the burden of the play in crucial moments offstage, a diminishing of effect and a blurring of outline seem inevitable.

In a traditional play, the necessities of realistic staging impose restrictions upon the playwright, and perhaps the chief restriction is the unity of place. Certainly, in terms of the story, there is fictional if not dramatic justice in allowing the action of *The Shadow of a Gunman* to by-pass the room of Davoren and Shields. Indeed, the story as it stands does not seem the material for drama. In the hands of a better craftsman than O'Casey was when he wrote the play, in the hands of a good craftsman of traditional structure, Davoren and Seumas would have denied Minnie while she and her accusers were onstage. This "obligatory scene" O'Casey avoids.

In Chekhov's plays, the greatest physical action occurs between the acts. If much action occurs during the act, there tends to be, as there is in the latter half of Act II of *The Shadow of a Gunman*, a lack of tension arising from the necessity of exposition of the offstage action. Again, a dramatic problem which the playwright did not properly meet.

An attempt at tension is made in the two-and-a-half-page scene following Minnie's exit, when an Auxiliary enters and bullies Davoren and Seumas. With the Auxiliary's exit, however, all danger has passed, and the remainder of the play is exposition, reported chiefly by Mrs.



Grigson. Some tension is generated by the exposition of Grigson's offstage humiliation. The comedy of this scene, opposed to the seriousness of the preceding and following scenes, is in the manner of the second structure. This juxtaposition of the tense and the slack here means only a turning from tragedy to comedy. The tragedy is not truly tense, however, and the comedy is not well integrated. In the two following plays, both the tragic and the comic will be tense and will mutually generate tension.

The last scene is notable for O'Casey's first attempt at a choral fusion. The fusion in this case is hurt because it is composed of relevant and irrelevant comments. In the two following plays, the comments will be from different viewpoints, but they will all be relevant. The chorus is composed of three elements. Mrs. Grigson has a long speech, giving the final news of Minnie's death and giving also an emotionally tinged comment on it:

What's goin' to happen next. Oh, Mr. Davoren, isn't it terrible, isn't it terrible! . . . The ambulance is bringin' her to the hospital, but what good's that when she's dead! Poor little Minnie, poor little Minnie Powell, to think of you full of life a few minutes ago, an' now she's dead!

To which Davoren adds a more intellectualized realization of the action's significance:

Ah me, alas! Pain, pain, pain ever, for ever! It's terrible to think that little Minnie is dead, but it's still more terrible to think that Davoren and Shields are alive! Oh, Donal Davoren, shame is your portion now till the silver cord is loosened and the golden bowl be broken. Oh, Davoren, Donal Davoren, poet and poltroon, poltroon and poet!

Then Seumas adds a final, irrelevantly ironic comment:

I knew something ud come of the tappin' on the wall!

As the realization comes to Davoren, the play partially returns to a traditional structure, for in such a play the characters will usually recognize the consequences of their actions more or less overtly and in a Chekhovian play they usually will not.

Of the three main actions in Act II, only Grigson's is developed according to traditional structure. Davoren never really acts; his crucial choice is made for him. The development of his plot is fictional, by exposition and the moment of illumination. There are many fine individual scenes, some excellent characterization and some riotously funny dialogue in this structural hybrid of a play, but eventually, I think, the play fails. The emphasis on Davoren in Act I, on Grigson in the first half of Act II, and on the offstage action in the last shifts the dramatic interest too confusingly.

Yet after writing these last few destructive pages, I saw the Actors' Studio's consummate production of the play and reeled from the theater, amazed at the play's effectiveness and appalled at my own density. But, rereading the play, I yet found most of my earlier criticisms persuasive. I think my dilemma might be explained by the critical reaction and subsequent double-take to *Death of a Salesman*. When the literati first saw the play, they were immensely moved; later when they read it they were disappointed. In other words, a play may be moving 1) on the boards and 2) in reflection or in a book. That is, a play may be drama and it may be literature, one or both. The *Gunman* is excellent drama.

The experiment here with the second structure was not, however, wasted. It would subsequently be put to brilliant use in *Juno* and in *The Plough and the Stars*.

*Juno and the Paycock* was first presented at the Abbey Theatre on March 3, 1924, with Barry Fitzgerald as Captain Boyle, Sara Allgood as Juno, Arthur Shields as Johnny, and Eileen Crowe as Mary. The play is built on the second structure throughout, and there are four main actions: that of Boyle, that of Juno, that of Johnny, and that of Mary. *Juno* is a successful and, indeed, a very fine play. In it, O'Casey would seem to perfect the tools he had discovered in *The Shadow of a Gunman* and to prepare himself to write his great tragi-comedy, *The Plough and the Stars*.

*Juno* has an exterior and an interior action. The exterior action provides the framework of the play, the beginning, the middle, and the end. In Act I, the Boyle family discovers the legacy. In Act II, the four protagonists revel in their supposed wealth. In Act III, they learn they have lost it. The three-act form does not provide as felicitous a form as the four-act for the traditional structure that the exterior action has. In *The Plough*, Act I is Exposition, Act II the Intrigue, Act III the Counterturn and Act IV the Denouement. In *Juno*, the Counterturn and the Denouement are both squeezed into the third act.

A major fault of the play is that the exterior action of the gain and loss of the legacy has little connection with some of the interior actions, particularly Johnny's. Also, the exterior action is not as important or as moving as the interior actions. In *The Plough*, the exterior action of the rebellion of Easter Week has a grim importance of its own, not only greater in scope than any of the interior actions, but also illuminating them with meaning. The loss of the legacy provides no such commentary; it only parallels the disintegration of the family without intensifying the meaning or without raising the interior actions to a broader ethical and a deeper emotional level. In *The Cherry Orchard*

and *The Three Sisters*, the loss of the orchard and the failure to go to Moscow both have great symbolic meaning for the interior actions. The exterior actions of these plays subtly interact with and substantiate the interior ones in a well-fused and meaningful structure. Such substantiation is impossible in *Juno* because, to cite one instance, Johnny's assassination is more serious and more moving than the loss of the legacy.

As there is a lesser importance and actually no tragic intensity generated by the exterior action of *Juno*, an action belonging essentially to domestic comedy or farce, the fusion needed for a tragedy built on the second structure must be reached artificially. The dramatist must manipulate his characters artificially to attain a sense of the tragic. In *Juno*, the sense of the tragic is conveyed primarily by one character, by Juno, rather than by all of the characters intermingling.

Of the interior actions of the play, Johnny's is built upon what might be termed an Ibsen structure. The Ibsen structure is a modified structure-of-action which omits the Intrigue and sometimes the Counterturn and fills the vacuum with a lengthy, dynamic type of Exposition all its own. Any number of Ibsen's plays will illustrate the structure, particularly *Ghosts* and *John Gabriel Borkmann*.

Most of the action has taken place in the Johnny story before the play opens. That preceding action is revealed by exposition, and the audience sees only the climax of that earlier action. In Act I, the Exposition is accomplished. The entrance of the Mobilizer at the end of Act II brings the action up to the Denouement, which has been foreshadowed ominously earlier in the act by the funeral of Mrs. Tancred's son. In Act III, the plot is unraveled, and Johnny is taken out and killed.

The Mary story is built on a purer structure-of-action. In Act I, the Exposition, Mary refuses Jerry Devine, and

Charles Bentham is introduced. In Act II, the Intrigue, Mary has become engaged to Bentham. In Act III, the Denouement, she is pregnant and deserted by both Bentham and Devine. The structure is a structure-of-action somewhat modified because most of the action occurs between the acts. This presentation, of course, is in the Chekhov manner. In place of a Counterturn in Act III, there is a pseudo-Counterturn when Mary announces her pregnancy to Juno. The actual Counterturn was at the moment of her consent, which occurred between the acts.

The Boyle action is built upon the second structure and consists mainly of ironic comments on Boyle's ideals and of actions which belie those ideals.

Johnny, Mary, and Boyle are each defeated, but their defeats have not the thematic relation of the defeats of the characters in *The Three Sisters*. O'Casey attempts a relation and a fusion by gathering all of these defeats together in the Juno action. Juno's defeat is the breaking up of her family. It is difficult to determine, however, what essential force is responsible for the various defeats. Broadly, it seems to be the innate frailty of man that leads him to do the wrong thing, regardless of his desires. The key to this defect might be Juno's comment, "I forgot, Mary, I forgot; your poor oul' selfish mother was only thinkin' of herself." It might well be argued that the characters are defeated because they pursue their own personal ends rather than considering the hopes of the others. Boyle avoids responsibility, Mary acts selfishly for her own pleasure, and Johnny becomes isolated by the contemplation of his own tragedy. This self-love, which has such disastrous results, seems recognized by Juno and condemned in her famous prayer:

Mother o' God, Mother o' God, have pity on us all! Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled



with bullets? Sacred Heart o' Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone, and give us hearts of flesh! Take away this murdherin' hate, an' give us Thine own eternal love!

The speech has a certain artificiality, however, as if O'Casey made Juno step out of the play and point the moral. By this speech, which draws the four actions together, O'Casey elevates the play artificially to tragedy. Arthur Miller in a similar fashion by Linda's "Attention must be paid" speech in *Death of a Salesman* attempts artificially, by having Linda step out of the play, to attain tragedy. Both speeches are similar, effective and eloquent, but Miller's is more false and editorial than O'Casey's. Although O'Casey's speech rises more normally out of the action than Miller's, it too is more explicit than is probably necessary. The theme of *The Plough and the Stars* is innate in the texture and substance of the play and needs no such editorializing.

Both Miller and O'Casey were dealing with squalid, drab, and tawdry contemporary reality. It is difficult and, according to Joseph Wood Krutch, perhaps impossible to construct tragedy from such materials, even though the authors truly feel the pathos and pity and tragedy of the situation. I do not agree with this view, and I think if the critics holding it would stop demanding *Oedipus Rex* they might see that good tragedies have been written by Strindberg, Hauptmann, Synge, Shaw, Benevente, and O'Neill—to mention but a few. It is not that it is impossible to write tragedy in our time; it is just that it is very hard to write tragedy at any time.

The authors of *Death of a Salesman* and *Juno and the Paycock* fall, I think, short, because of their selectivity. The arranging, pointing, and emphasizing auctorial hand is too obvious in *Salesman*, and the auctorial attitude toward the materials of the play hurts *Juno*. O'Casey's building

blocks in the play are not necessarily hackneyed although some of them, like the treacherous lover and the deserted maiden, are a bit usual. O'Casey's melodramatic or too pathetic attitude toward these materials makes some scenes almost embarrassingly unplayable. For instance, some of Jerry Devine's lines in his final scene with Mary need excellent acting if the scene is to be saved from the maudlin. His "My God, Mary, have you fallen as low as that?" or Mary's poem in the same scene constantly totter on the edge of cheap sentimentality. The shadow of Dion Boucicault dogs O'Casey constantly and falls across even the pages of his last play.

Despite these flaws *Juno* is a masterpiece. The fusion at the end of the play, when the impact of the final scene between Boyle and Joxer is contrasted with the previous scene containing Juno's speech, is one of the most devastating moments of the modern drama. The magnificence of the dialogue, the brilliance of the comedy, and the inimitability of the characterization sweep away triumphantly most of the criticisms I have made.

I have purposely avoided pointing out the excellences of the play specifically or examining the play in detail because everything that is done well in *Juno* is done with perfection in *The Plough and the Stars*, the most cunningly contrived and greatest achievement of O'Casey's early period.

That play I want to examine in detail.

O'Casey's next major play, *The Plough and the Stars*, was first produced at the Abbey by Lennox Robinson on Monday, February 8, 1926, with Barry Fitzgerald as Fluther, F. J. McCormick as Clitheroe, Shelah Richards as Nora, and with Eileen Crowe, Arthur Shields, and Ria Mooney. The second act precipitated the Abbey's most



celebrated riot since the Dublin playgoers arose and roared at the obscene use of the obscene word "shift" in Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* in 1907.

Even before production, however, the play had difficulties. George O'Brien, as Lady Gregory records in her *Journal*, strenuously objected to much of the language, and it was only after great bickering and an eventual firm stand by Yeats that the play was allowed to go virtually unslashed into production. Yeats wrote:

We agree with you about Clitheroe and his wife. That love scene in the first act is most objectionable and, as you said, does not ring true. What is wrong is that O'Casey is there writing about people whom he does not know, whom he has only read about. We had both decided when we first read the play that he should be asked to try and modify these characters, bringing them within the range of his knowledge. When that is done the objectionable elements will lose their sentimentality and thereby their artistic offence. We decided that if he cannot do this the dialogue would have to be greatly modified in rehearsal.

Now we come to the prostitute in Act II. She is certainly as necessary to the general action and idea as are the drunkards and wastrels. O'Casey is contrasting the ideal dream with the normal grossness of life and of that she is an essential part. It is no use putting her in if she does not express herself vividly and in character, if her "professional" side is not emphasized. Almost certainly a phrase here and there must be altered in rehearsal but *the scene as a whole is admirable, one of the finest O'Casey has written. To eliminate any parts of it on grounds that have nothing to do with dramatic literature would be to deny all our traditions.*

A few capitulations were made. Perhaps the chief one was the omission of Rosie Redmond's song at the end of

Act II, an omission that seems to me structurally damaging. When Yeats told O'Casey of the excision, O'Casey said, "Yes. It's a pity. It would offend thousands. But it ought to be there." Yeats further wrote:

The other passages you mention are the kind of things which are dealt with in rehearsal by the producer (in almost every one of O'Casey's plays the dialogue has been here and there a little modified and he has never objected to our modification), but we are inclined to think that the use of the word "bitch" in Act IV is necessary. It occurs when Bessie, receiving her mortal wound, turns furiously on the woman whose delirium has brought it on her. The scene is magnificent and we are loth to alter a word of it.

Despite the riot, the pruning of dialogue by the Directors, and the refusal of actors to speak such lines as "within the borders of the Ten Commandments" and "snotty," O'Casey had succeeded in creating a brilliant play. In it, he progressed to the four-act division, which is more adaptable to the structure-of-action of the framework, the exterior action, of the play. As in *Juno*, the emphasis changes through the acts from predominantly comic to almost wholly tragic. This play, perhaps more than the earlier ones, is tinged with melodrama.

There are eight main actions in the play: that of Nora, of Jack, of Bessie, of Fluther, of Peter, of the Covey, of Mrs. Gogan, and of Mollser. These characters find themselves set in circumstances which render them powerless, and all attempt in various ways to adapt themselves to the circumstances, to ignore them, to accept them, or to change them.

Jack attempts to change his environment by joining the Citizen Army. When the environment evidences a fierce retaliation by a literal battle, Jack continues to fight only

because he is afraid and ashamed to give up. His effort results in his death in battle.

Nora attempts to ignore her environment and to escape it, to defeat the tenement world by creating a world of beauty and romance. Her evasion is defeated by the world's destroying the romance and taking her husband from her. She goes insane.

Bessie Burgess accepts the environment intellectually, but because she is humanely drawn to aid those who have been shaped and hurt by the environment, she is killed.

The environment shapes and kills the tubercular Mollser.

Mollser is Mrs. Gogan's daughter, and the environment hurts Mrs. Gogan through Mollser.

The Covey and Peter both erect sham defenses against the environment: Covey by his inane and feckless interpretation of Communism, Peter by his uniform with its connotations of splendor and purpose. The impotence of both remedies is indicated by the manner in which the environment controls the two men. They hide in a room to avoid being shot; they are herded together into a church with a guarded mob. They make no resistance, because their remedies, being only sham and fragile, were not able to give them the strength to resist.

Fluther is also herded into the church and, hence, ruled by society. He is, despite this, a brave man. He is willing to risk his life to find Nora. He is also a sensible man, and by refusing to join the Citizen Army like Clitheroe or to erect sham defenses like Peter and the Covey, realizes implicitly that one man is not enough to change the environment. Rather, he attempts to live as fully as he can within the society. Instead of joining the army, he goes home with Rosie Redmond. Instead of getting drunk on patriotic eloquence, he gets drunk on whisky.

While Fluther accommodates himself to society as best he can without fighting, he is, at least, guided by a con-

sistent and moral view. Rosie Redmond, on the other hand, amorally accommodates herself to any situation. She is half true *joie de vivre*, half sluttishness.

From the defeat of each of these characters, O'Casey fashions the meaning, the fusion, and the tragic import of his play. Further, all of the acts are similarly constructed. The main characters are set in four different situations: the first act shows intimations of war, the second a direct overture and incitement to war, the third the war itself, and the last the aftermath of the war. The exterior action, then, presents four stages of growth and decline. After the various interior actions have received their development within the act, O'Casey brings a number of them together and counterpoints their diversity to form a Chekhovian chorus. There are four choral movements or summations, one at the end of each act and all rising out of the skeleton structure of the four stages of the war. As in *The Cherry Orchard*, the characters in *The Plough and the Stars* have no control over this exterior structure. The theme of the play is to show that they do not control their own personal problems and relationships in the interior actions either.

Act I is a good example of the structure used in each of the acts: Scene i, through conversation between Fluther and Mrs. Gogan, primarily characterizes Nora and suggests a conflict between Nora and Jack. The desires of the young couple and the methods each has chosen to react to society are also introduced. Scene ii is a continuation of these subjects, but stresses Jack's desire to join the Citizen Army. Scene i is Nora's; Scene ii is Jack's. The long conversation between Fluther and Mrs. Gogan is broken up by the Chekhovian manner of having a character enter into or exit from the scene. In this case, the numerous entrances and exits of Peter are a signal for the subject of Fluther and Mrs. Gogan's conversation to be broken off and to change. Superficially, the conversation seems rambling, but

an immense amount of exposition and characterization is dynamically presented by it. The latter half of Scene ii, for instance, characterizes Fluther. Scene iii has three actions occurring simultaneously, a frequent device of both Chekhov and O'Casey. The chief movement in the scene is a characterization of Fluther and the Covey by the "mollycewel" argument. Mrs. Gogan introduces the current political scene by leaning out the window and noticing the cheering workers. Peter continues to bumble about with his uniform. Scene iv connects the Covey and Peter by the argument that will run throughout the play. This connection is appropriate because of the similar defenses against society that the two men erect. Scene v is a continuation of this argument and a method of bringing Nora onstage and centrally establishing her. Scenes vi and vii belong to Bessie. The first characterizes her; the second gets her offstage by introducing Clitheroe.

The entrances and exits are uniformly smooth and often brilliantly in contrast to the awkward ones of *The Shadow of a Gunman*. Bessie's entrance is one of O'Casey's best. Also, his transition scenes are compressed into the end of the preceding scene, rather than standing awkwardly alone. Nora enters to mediate in the argument between Peter and the Covey; Jack enters to mediate in the argument between Bessie and Nora.

Scene viii is a transition to the long ninth scene of the dinner, which mainly is a continuation of the Peter-Covey argument. The end of the scene gets the Covey offstage, while Scene x removes Peter. Finally the stage is cleared for the act's first uninterrupted duet. O'Casey makes much less use of the duet than does Chekhov.

The Nora-Jack scene proceeds from argument over the hat, to agreement, and to final romantic unity when Nora persuades Jack to sing. The romantic unity of the scene is immediately countered by the entrance of Brennan and



a breaking of unity and romance as Brennan persuades Jack to go off to the Citizen Army.

The last three scenes in each act function in this manner: an emotion is presented in one scene, countered by a contrary emotion in the next, and both emotions are syllogistically fused in a third scene which presents snatches of various emotions and views. The last scene of Act I, the choral scene, has three movements. The first introduces Mollser; the second introduces a regiment of soldiers outside singing, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary"; the third has the nature of an ominous prophecy arising out of the singing by Bessie, and all of these discordant elements are summed up by Mollser's, "Is there anybody goin', Mrs. Clitheroe, with a tither o' sense?"

This first act would make an effective one-act play, and actually the play has not the integral, causally connected rising movement of a structure-of-action play. It is essentially four distinct one-acts. In the one-act form, O'Casey wrote seven of his first nine plays. *The Shadow of a Gunman*, although in a two-act form, is really two separate plays. In *Juno*, O'Casey added a third act and in *The Plough* a fourth. The second act of *The Plough* had, however, first been written as a one-act called *The Cooing of the Doves* in 1923. The nature of the acts in the longer plays is sometimes akin to Tennessee Williams' manner of writing short scenes and building up a play out of them.

Act II, Scene i, is a chorus with Rosie's first speech acting as ironic commentary. Scene ii between Fluther and Peter is effective mainly because of the irony of Fluther's assertions that he would never drink, that occurred in Act I, and his thirsty appearance in this act. The play is permeated with such contrasts in which a person's actions belie his words. These ironies underscore the theme of the play, the futility of the various characters' constructed ideals.

Scenes iv and v primarily lead up to and portray the

Mrs. Gogan-Bessie argument. Scenes vi and vii are transition scenes to get characters on and offstage. Scene viii is the argument between Fluther and the Covey. In all of these scenes of argument and bombast, the lies and pomposities that negate the words, the reversals, and the perversions of fact are underscored. For instance, Rosie screams that the Covey attempted to seduce her, but that she would have nothing to do with him, when actually she had earlier been rebuffed by him. Thus, throughout the scene, a basis of falsity beneath all of the characters is erected, so that when Clitheroe, Brennan, and Langon enter in Scene x, their sincerity becomes also questionable. The soldier's falsity is further emphasized by the melodramatic aura of the scene and by the bombastic verbiage. "Imprisonment for th' Independence of Ireland!"

Scenes ix, x, and xi function as did Scenes xi, xii, and xiii in Act I. From the contrasts of the falsities presented earlier in the act, emerges the choral fusion of the last scene which is composed of two elements: the soldiers offstage and Rosie and Fluther onstage. Offstage sounds are a bugle which is counterpointed by Rosie and Fluther's conversation, an officer's voice giving a command which is counterpointed by Rosie's song (and the omission of the song in the first production appears an obvious violation of the play's structure, because the balance of the scene would be greatly impaired by the omission), and finally Clitheroe's voice. As Rosie and Fluther go off to dance "a jig in the bed," the Irish Citizen Army marches off to battle. The obverse of the heroics of the soldiers is the reality of Fluther and the sordid prostitute. The meaning is obviously that the baser actions of Fluther and Rosie are an integral part of human character and will doom to failure the loftier motives of the soldiers.

Act III occurs during Easter Week, 1916. Scene i, between Mollser and Mrs. Gogan, briefly supplies the expo-



sition and presents an ironic contrast between the solicitous, humane Mrs. Gogan of this act and the embattled harpy of Act II. Mollser's illness provides a parallel undertone to the general illness, the war, and also suggests that the fighters from the tenements are as ill and weakened by society as is the little girl.

Scene ii is ironically effective by showing the Covey and Peter momentarily in harmony because of the battle, after having clawed at each other during the first two acts. Bessie's appearance at the window has somewhat of a choral effect by presenting an outside commentary on the battle. Bessie's isolation physically from the rest of the characters also underscores her mental isolation from them—a contrivance that Chekhov was also fond of.

Scene iii continues the Nora action. This particular plot functions by a traditional structure. The Exposition is in Act I, the Intrigue and Counterturn are in Act III, and the Denouement comes in Act IV. The Counterturn comes when Nora clutches Jack to beg him to stay with her. The same act is the Counterturn of Jack's story, which is also developed by a structure-of-action. The Denouement of the Jack story is reported in Act IV, rather than enacted on the stage. The reporting of his death is effective in this play because of the multiplicity of actions and the necessity of simplicity to avoid bogging down in the unraveling as Ben Jonson sometimes did. When, however, in a later play like *Red Roses for Me*, the hero of the play's main action, a modified structure-of-action, is killed offstage, and his death is reported by a Chekhovian messenger from a structure-of-character, the result is often a strong structural weakness.

The looting scenes provide biting contrasts to the fighting and to the previously voiced ideals. The looting is the obverse of the coin, as was the action of Rosie and Fluther in Act II. There is, then, the constant contrast between the

ideals impelling the exterior action and the reality of the interior actions denying those ideals. Within the interior actions, there are also ideals negated by the contrary actions of the characters. All of this interaction contributes a much greater complexity and tension to the play than was possessed by *Juno and the Paycock*.

One deed may, for instance, function both as a comment on the exterior and an interior action. Clitheroe's fear in Act III and Brennan's fear in Act IV work on both of these levels.

Scenes vii and viii are counterpointed by Scene ix, when Brennan and Clitheroe enter with the wounded Langon. The appearance of these characters now is, of course, compared by the viewer to their triumphant and jubilant appearance in the previous act. This scene is quite long and, as often occurs in O'Casey, contains at least three strands of action. The chief movement is the Counterturn of the Nora and Jack actions. Another is the death of Langon, which is identified with the Jack action. The third is another choral appearance of Bessie at the window: "General Clitheroe'd rather be unlacin' his wife's bodice than standin' at a barricade . . ." Bessie almost takes on the aspect of a prophet of doom in this act. She is called an "oul hag," and her repetition of "Choke th' chicken, Choke th' chicken!" surely does much to dehumanize her.

The melodrama of Acts I and II seems to evolve in this scene to a rough pathos. The scene, which could easily be banal, is controlled by several means: by tension in the dialogue, by the physical struggle between Nora and Clitheroe, and certainly by the drunken entrance of Fluther. In his stage direction, O'Casey calls Fluther, "Frenzied, wild-eyed, mad." Clitheroe and Brennan exemplify another type of frenzied, wild-eyed madness, so that again an ironic contrast appears.

The disparity of views in Scenes ix and x culminates in

another choral fusion at the last of Scene x. Fluther's drunken shouts outside the house are counterpointed by Nora's frenzied screams inside, by Mollser's illness, by the real unity of Mrs. Gogan and Bessie over Mollser's illness—a strong contrast to their enforced unity over the perambulator and to their fight in Act II.

Fluther's story is based on a traditional structure. Act I was the Exposition, Act II the Intrigue; Act III when he, like Brennan and Clitheroe, is unable to act at a crisis, is the Counterturn, and Act IV, when he is herded into the church as part of a guarded mob, the Denouement.

The various troubles of the scene, particularly Mollser's illness and Nora's madness, devolve upon and culminate in Bessie. She seems to gather all the actions and failures up into a generalized prayer as she sallies out to find aid. "Oh, God, be Thou my help in time of throuble. An' shelter me sagely in th' shadow of Thy Wings!" This prayer, unlike Juno's, is not explicit preaching, but by growing out of the action raises the play to a higher level of meaning and emotional intensity.

The Bessie action is also traditionally structured, although the structure is a fuller one because of the character reversal. Act I charts her character and is the Exposition. Act II is the Intrigue. Act III, when she decides to join the others by going for help for Mollser, is the Counterturn, and the Denouement is in Act IV when, by her entrance into the action, she is killed.

The play's exterior action, like that of *The Cherry Orchard* and of *Juno*, proceeds by traditional structure. Act I is the Exposition, Act II the Intrigue, Act III the Counterturn, the critical point of the battle and also the critical point in most of the interior actions. In Act IV, the Denouement, Nora has become insane, a messenger arrives to report Clitheroe's death, Bessie is killed, Mollser has died, and Brennan, Peter, the Covey, and Fluther are herded off

to be guarded. The comic element in this act has nearly disappeared. The action is subdued in tone. There is little concern for external events. The conflict between the Covey and Peter is muted. All of the characters are concerned with the effects of Act III and with the working out of their own personal destinies. The comic element in the earlier acts appears when the characters are in control of their destinies. In this act, their destinies are controlled externally, and their high spirits are muted.

The exterior action makes itself felt more in this act than in the others by the continual and frequent offstage actions, which come to dominate the scene. Voices cry for the Red Cross; there are occasional shots, one killing Bessie. Most of the major characters yet alive are forced to take refuge from society by hiding in one room, where only briefly Fluther, Peter, and the Covey can regain the semblance of their earlier flamboyance by engaging in a short and furtive card game.

The external world, the war, comes to dominate the act. The major characters are defeated and driven from the stage. The soldiers, Corporal Stoddart and Sergeant Tinley, hold the stage at the curtain. Spatially, the play is an expansion and a retraction. In the Exposition of the exterior action, the characters are confined to the tenement. In the Intrigue, they revolt, emerge into the streets and the pubs. In the Reversal, they are driven back to the street in front of the tenement. In the Denouement, they are driven inside the tenement, and all through Act IV they are driven further, until finally there is no room for them even in their own home, the tenement. First bullets enter through the windows and kill one of them. Then Stoddart enters, and at last Stoddart and Tinley both dispossess the characters and hold the tenement. This spatial movement parallels the theme. The rebels are not only driven back to

their original hovel, but they are exterminated from the face of the earth.

Finally, as the red glare of fires appears in the window, Stoddart and Tinley settle down comfortably and sing, "Keep the 'owme fires burning." The song is a monstrous mockery of the traditional reaffirmation, like the arrival of Fortinbras or a "calm, all passion spent," and when contrasted to the fires outside it provides one of the most terrible uses of irony since the grim final sentence of *Gulliver's Travels*.

There is a certain distrust of the play as tragedy by some critics—among them Mr. Krutch—because the materials used are the melodramatic, bathetic, and even banal tools of a Dion Boucicault. Whatever Boucicault's faults, however, he was a brilliantly competent arranger of plots. If Boucicault led O'Casey toward the snares of sentimentality, he also taught him much about a strong structuring. The melodrama, the bathos, and the banality are, in *The Plough and the Stars*, utilized, subsumed, and ultimately negated by the hard, intellectual, Chekhovian structure of the play and by the irony within the structure which creates cohesion, tension, and intensely moving complexities of meaning.

The irony of the second structure acts as the catalyst which brings about the fusion and the ultimate catharsis, and no critic should ever conclude that tragedy and pathos are not related; tragedy is an extension of pathos, differentiated only by the high intensity of intellectual awareness. O'Casey, by his masterly handling of the second structure, makes that extension brilliantly and does what every tragic writer does—converts the tawdry materials of reality into their essence. If there is any play that claims to be a modern tragedy, *The Plough and the Stars* is it.

To me, the play is more than a tragedy. It is the most magnificent affirmation since Chekhov that there is a third major genre, tragi-comedy. Let the little Sarceys of Broadway chew on that.



# 4

## EXPRESSIONISM AND ROMANTIC ANARCHY

I regard the whole of the later Sean O'Casey as pretentious twaddle.

*James Agate*

The movement called Expressionism would have fully justified its existence even if O'Casey's plays alone were the products of its germinating impulse.

*Allardyce Nicoll*

As early as 1926, Denis Johnston, the Irish Expressionist dramatist and the author of *The Old Lady Says No!*, was, in the pages of *Living Age*, able to survey O'Casey's first three major plays and to predict with considerable acumen that

. . . it is becoming more and more clear that as a realist he is an impostor. He will tell you the name and address of the person who made each individual speech in any of his plays, but we are not deceived by his protestations. His dialogue is becoming a series of word-poems in dialect; his plots are disappearing and giving place to a form of undisguised expressionism under the stress of a genius that is much too insistent and far too pregnant with meaning to be bound by the four dismal walls of orthodox realism. It will be interest-

ing to see how long in the future he will try to keep up so outrageous a pretense.

O'Casey would keep up the pretense no longer than the first act of his next play, *The Silver Tassie*. In the controversial second act of that play, he would use as a rejuvenated tool the Expressionism which had died of malnutrition in Germany a decade before.

Although isolated instances, like the work of Ludwig Tieck or Part II of Goethe's *Faust*, may seem anticipations of the form, dramatic Expressionism as an organized movement with a coherent theory is quite modern, and it had its inception in the work of Strindberg and Wedekind. It had its greatest popularity in Germany from about 1910 to 1924 when authors like Hauptmann, Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller and even authors outside Germany, like Luigi Chiarelli and the brothers Kapek, were intrigued by the form. Since then Expressionist dramas have appeared sporadically, but the form, except in a few instances like *Beggar on Horseback* and *Lady in the Dark*, has rarely given signs of popular assimilation or success. Plays like Rice's *The Adding Machine*, Priestley's *Johnson Over Jordan*, or Williams' *Camino Real* have so far been more successful on the page than on the stage. Although the form has failed to displace the realistic drama, its techniques have been most influential and are frequently utilized even in such commercial successes as *Auntie Mame*. One of the most successful uses of Expressionistic techniques in recent years has been Arthur Miller's grafting of it onto an Ibsen structure in *Death of a Salesman*.

One of the best definitions of Expressionism comes from a lecture by the German critic Kasimir Edschmid, which I quote from Richard Samuel and R. Hinton Thomas' book *Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre*:

The Expressionists . . . do not work as photographers, but they are overcome by visions. They do not try to catch the "momentary effect of a situation" but its "eternal significance." They are not concerned with "descriptions" but with "experience." They do not "reproduce" but "create," they are not "receptive" but "searching" for a new conception of the world. . . .

The process of artistic creation had therefore become entirely different. Whereas the Impressionists aimed merely at reproducing the impression that an object or situation made upon them, the Expressionists endeavour to express its inner meaning . . . it is not the casual circumstances of a man or woman that interest the Expressionists but the humanity of the person as they see it. Everything else is "façade," showing a "bourgeois" attitude that is to be destroyed with its superficial judgements of right or wrong. Once the bourgeois mask is torn away the link with eternity given to every human being will be revealed.

. . . if he gives facts from everyday existence he only does so to convey their general significance. When he describes sick or mad individuals, for example, they interest him only as symbols of the afflictions of mankind as a whole.

Expressionism, then, is concerned with portraying essences. Its themes will be almost explicitly apparent and only thinly embodied. I am not fond of most Expressionistic dramas, for I think that, although meaning is essential to a play, meaning will weaken the play if it is overtly stated, rather than implied by three-dimensional characters engaged in a significant action. Samuel and Thomas comment, to my mind accurately, that "the Expressionist works of lasting value are those which preserve most clearly the link with tradition," and further, speaking of Kaiser's *Gas*, that "the author attains his effect . . . by a sparing use of such Expressionist devices as would involve the dis-

tortion of the dramatic structure." As we will see in *The Silver Tassie* and in *Red Roses for Me*, O'Casey does not hesitate to distort his structure by the use of Expressionism. I do not suggest that Expressionistic techniques inevitably distort a play but an author must use those techniques warily and assimilate them well, as O'Casey does in some later plays, like *Purple Dust* and *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, that I think are considerably better than the *Tassie* or *Red Roses*.

I believe that Expressionist drama is most successful when it has a basis in well-drawn characterization. Too often these plays become entangled in the mazes of auctorial sensibility and emerge as confusing and undramatic. I have in mind particularly Strindberg's *Spook Sonata* and O'Neill's *The Great God Brown*. I do not imply that Expressionism is inevitably undramatic. There is a middle ground between the frequent objectivity of Toller and the sometimes baffling subjectivity of Strindberg, a middle ground in which the Expressionist dramatist can anchor his vision of the real halfway between vision and reality. I think that Kaiser's *Gas* is a successful compromise between these extremes and is a good play.

O'Casey had been introduced to Expressionism by the Dublin Drama League's presentation of Ernst Toller's *Masse Mensch*, and even in *The Plough and the Stars* Expressionistic elements had begun to appear: the offstage voice of the man in Act II and the anonymous woman in Act III, for example. The structure of Toller's play, like most Expressionist plays, is traditional and simple, with The Woman as the protagonist. The play is divided into seven scenes. Scenes I, III, V and VII present the action; Scenes II, IV and VI present amplification of the action in the realm of the ideal. Scene I is the Exposition and presents an entrance into the action by the Husband's attempts "to dissuade the woman from the communist leadership she has

assumed." Scene III is the Intrigue, in which the "woman, symbolizing the individual, pleads for a bloodless strike, as against the Nameless One, who represents Mass, crying for revolution." Scene V continues the Intrigue when "the workers, suffering defeat, make a last stand against the overwhelming power of the state." Scene VII is the Reversal, in which the Woman rejects aid from her husband, from the priest and from the Nameless One, and it is also the Denouement, in which the Woman exits to her execution. These "realistic" scenes are presented in the same stylized manner as the three subjective scenes, the Woman's dream sequences. This completely stylized presentation, of course, blurs any demarcation Toller might have wanted between the real and the ideal. The fault is the author's, for the diction of the realistic acts and many of the technical devices are no different from those of the subjective scenes. These subjective scenes attempt to do what characterization does in a normal play or what stream of consciousness does in a novel. These scenes enter the Woman's mind, present her fears, increase the complexity of her conflict and attempt to broaden her as a character. O'Casey uses the same method in *Red Roses for Me* but with considerably more dexterity. His real world is real and quite distinguishable from his dream world of Act III. Toller's play is a fairly typical example of the form; I dislike it extremely. The story and the structure are the very simplest. Characterization, which could add interest, is nonexistent. The dialogue is flat.

A more successful Expressionist play, Georg Kaiser's *Gas*, is also based on the traditional structure, but the story line is treated with some of the interest-catching complication of a conventional play and the story never diverges from a dramatic into a lyric presentation as does Toller's. Because Kaiser's plot is more complex, his characters are more complex and more interesting. Instead of



abstractions, Kaiser gives us characters pruned toward abstraction and still obtains the broader relevance and explicitness of theme that he wants. Too often this broader relevance in Expressionist plays will be unpalatably simple because there is not enough plot structure and characterization to support it. If the Expressionist dramatist does not fall into oversimplification like Toller, his subjective view may easily lead him to the overcomplexity of Strindberg or O'Neill.

Not only the traditional structure of these two Expressionist plays, but also the close relation of the best Expressionist plays to the traditional would suggest that the form has strict and defined limitations. When a master of an alien structure, like Sean O'Casey, adopts Expressionism we may expect that some curious offspring will result.

The first result was the tragi-comedy in four acts, *The Silver Tassie*; it was first produced by C. B. Cochran in the Apollo Theatre in London on October 11, 1929. Charles Laughton played Harry Heegan and Barry Fitzgerald played Sylvester Heegan. The play was produced in London rather than at the Abbey because a violent and well-publicized quarrel over the play's merits had permanently estranged O'Casey and the Abbey.\* The rift was crucial not only for the theater which subsequently entered the doldrums from which it has never emerged, but also for O'Casey who, without the restrictions of a definite stage and audience, became irretrievably the experimental dramatist. As he later wrote in *Rose and Crown*:

There was no importance in trying to do the same thing again . . . He wanted a change from what the Irish critics had called burlesque, photographic realism, or slices of life, though the manner and method of two of the plays [evi-

\* See Appendix.



dently *Juno* and *The Plough*] were as realistic as the scents stealing from a gaudy bunch of blossoms.

The *Tassie* is a transitional piece; it is not completely Expressionistic, but has three realistic acts to one Expressionistic one. There are, however, hints of Expressionism in the "realistic" acts. The long foolery between Sylvester and Simon at the beginning of Act I, though, is in O'Casey's old manner. Earlier such dialogues had served as ironic commentary, but in the *Tassie* they serve as the realistic base of the play, the real world upon which the terrible abstract dream of the war in Act II is imposed. The dialogues are one of several different attitudes toward reality and of several different dramatic methods along a continuum extending from heightened realism to subjective lyricism. Charles Morgan in the *London Times* wrote of the play's method that:

Hitherto it has commonly been demanded of a play that it be tragic, or that it be comic, or, if by profession a tragic-comedy [which the *Tassie* professes to be] that the contrasted elements should remain distinct, the one appearing as a relief to the other. This theory Mr. O'Casey has definitely abandoned, and has substituted for it another, still very unfamiliar in the theatre, though having its now recognized counterpart in the novels of Mr. Aldous Huxley. We are no longer invited to give attention to one aspect of life and to consider it dominant for the time being. The unity of a work of art is no longer to depend upon the consistency of its material. Instead, as if some diamond were being rolled over and tossed in the air before our eyes, we are so to observe its facets of tragedy, comedy, and open farce that their flashing becomes at last one flash and perhaps by imaginative and symbolic transition, one spiritual light. Unity is to spring from diversity. The elements of drama are to be compounded—not separated, not mixed.

Unity springing from diversity was the basis of the second structure that O'Casey utilized in *Juno* and in *The Plough*. In the *Tassie*, the diversity is not of viewpoint but of dramatic method within the same play. This fact has caused most critics to boggle hesitantly over the play, and, ignoring such partisan noncriticism as, "It is a vigorous medley of lust and hatred and vulgarity," "It is a poisonous draught from a dirty cup," a "guttersnipe's rhapsody," a "revolting production," a "latest horror," a "crowning piece of offensiveness," and a mixture of "bunkum and drool," which O'Casey seems to evoke regularly from the Irish press, this confusion is reflected in even more sober criticism. For instance, a comment of Desmond McCarthy's on *Within the Gates* has also considerable application for *The Silver Tassie*:

. . . my colleagues have introduced the words "Strindberg," "Spook Sonata," in their endeavour to indicate the novel technique of Mr. O'Casey's play. I believe that they have looked too far afield. What is peculiar about it is that he has endeavoured to use the technique of *musical comedy* to express philosophical tragedy.

The surmise seems wide of the mark, although it is correct in suggesting one of the methods used in both plays, and analogously suggestive by comparing the technique to musical comedy's diverse, succeeding turns, which are certainly as close a parallel as the *Times* reviewer's diamond metaphor. The critical evaluations of the play ran the gamut from Benn Levy's "inevitable failure" and Harold Clurman's "uncouth and culturally juvenile" to Stark Young's "challenging" and Edith Isaacs' "beautiful, tormenting."

The play has a protagonist, Heegan, and a traditional structure. The structure is distorted and warped because of the play's diversity of dramatic methods and particularly

by the Expressionistic second act. There are also reminiscences of the second structure in the play. For instance, the Teddy Foran plot is a microcosm of the main plot and a substantiating parallel to the main action. Unlike the second structure, the characters are all, except Heegan and Foran, static. When Walter Starkie commented that he was unable to see growth in Susie Monican's character, O'Casey replied that there was no growth.

Act I falls into three main movements, each treated by a different dramatic method. The Sylvester-Simon-Susie movement is in O'Casey's old manner of heightened realism. The Teddy-Mrs. Foran-Sylvester scene is farce. The final movement, which Heegan dominates, is a curious combination of Dion Boucicault melodrama and Expressionism. The two earlier scenes pointed to Heegan and contained preparations and hints for his entrance. Susie's entire motivation, developed in Scene i, depends upon her feelings for Heegan. In Scene iii all of the characters are oriented around Heegan; he dominates them and the scene. Barney exists only as his friend, Foran as the soldier who goes with him, and the mother and father and Simon as realistic adjuncts of him. His exploits, the winning of the Tassie and leaving for war, command their attention, and he is clearly the protagonist.

The offstage voices are unrealistic and suggest transitionally the unindividualized mass into which Harry is to disappear in Act II. Act II is primarily Expressionistic although the Visitor and the Staff Wallah become a bit more than abstractions, and their sections are satire rather than lyricism. Charles Morgan felt that:

Mr. O'Casey's attempt to make his play take wings from naturalistic earth succeeds; we move in a new plane of imagination. Yet the scene is not a masterpiece. The elements are not truly compounded. There appear two farcical figures of

a Staff Wallah and a Visitor whose coming shatters the illusion and momentarily reduces Mr. O'Casey's irony to the level of a mean, silly, and irrelevant sneer.

I think that these two figures provide the only vital bit in the act and that when they appear the whole business begins to get off the ground. The act is written largely in verse of a rather poor quality, and the satiric and characterizing dialogue of these two characters is a welcome relief from the monotonously abstract language of the rest of the act.\* I should like, however, to defer a detailed discussion of language to a later chapter.

Reports of the staging of the first production indicate that great care and much talent were expended over this act. Augustus John designed a striking and effective set, and Raymond Massey, according to reports, made much of stage grouping. As in the third act of *Red Roses for Me*, what seems to occur is a stage magic which does not arise from the words so much as it does from the conception, exemplified by the composer, the musician, the choreographer, the dancer, the costumer, and the set designer. The result may be, as it is reported to have been in the *Tassie* and in the recent New York production of *Red Roses*, magical. It is not a dramatic magic, however, but the magic of a hybrid art like Martha Graham's or Jean Louis Barrault's.

Nothing is intrinsically wrong with such methods of expression. Nor is there anything "wrong" with the various methods of expression that O'Casey counterpoints in *The Silver Tassie*. Playgoing, after all, is an artificial affair. One agrees to submit, to undergo the willing suspension of

\* For the opposite viewpoint convincingly presented, see Ronald Ayling's comparison of this language with that of *The Family Reunion* (*English Studies In Africa*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 247-250). The article also contains an interesting comment of Eliot's on O'Casey's expressionist plays.

disbelief, to join in the convention, and, indeed, actually to participate by empathy. And a play is only successful to the extent that it is able to arouse empathy. Through empathy, comes catharsis. There is, then, logically no reason, as the viewer agrees to participate in the convention—a convention which is at its most real, unreal—that the conventions within a drama cannot be varied. O'Casey had earlier certainly proved that the distinct separation between comedy and tragedy, even in a tragi-comedy, could be broken down, and that even irony can be mingled with its utter antithesis, melodrama. If one, then, can mingle genres producing divers emotions and cathartic effects that relegate the viewer even within one play to varying emotional distances from the play—distances ranging from complete identification in moments of high intensity, to complete divorce, in the sense of an intellectual awareness of participation in a convention, in high comedy—there is, then, no reason why O'Casey can not mix techniques if all of his techniques are dramatic.

Act II of *The Silver Tassie* fails because the Expressionist technique has gone beyond drama: nothing happens; the act is static, sheer mood. It depends for effectiveness less upon the dramatist than upon the set designer. Perhaps the best criterion for effectiveness is whether or not something can be cut from a play, for a good play like a good poem is organic. And in a good play, every element, even the smallest line of dialogue, should be a necessary contribution to the final result. The plot of *The Silver Tassie* would not suffer in the least if the second act were omitted. The question is only whether the act is emotionally necessary. The answer lies, I think, in O'Casey's intention, or at least in what should have been his intention if he wanted to produce a good play. The play exists to condemn war by showing its effects on an individual, Heegan. The Expressionist act is included to present a condemnation



of war indirectly and on an abstract moral basis. It presents a spot behind the lines in a period of inactivity. It treats the scene in a stylized manner. Consequently, it does not present as much of the war as does, say, Sheriff's *Journey's End*, which takes place in a dugout on the front lines. Actually, the only full way to present the war would be in a motion picture. O'Casey would say that it was his intention to present the war in the manner that he did. He would argue from two good points: it is impossible to achieve on the stage the verisimilitude necessary to create the illusion of war, so why try? And also, stylization, by stripping away the cluttering detail, presents the essence, the emotional-intellective core of war.

Neither of the arguments is completely valid. Granted, it is impossible to present a war onstage, and most dramatists even when they present segments of a war onstage, by alarums and excursions, for instance, agree to present their attitude toward war by embodying that reaction in a character. This is also O'Casey's method in Acts I, III, and IV. But even so, there would be nothing wrong with O'Casey's method in Act II if that method were dramatic. It is not. Harry Heegan is not in the act, although in the London production, Laughton, who played Heegan, also played the First Soldier in Act II. Act II was presented, then, ambivalently. Was Heegan onstage or not? According to O'Casey, he was not. We have only characters called First Soldier, Second Soldier, and so on. Yet there seemed a need to get Laughton onstage in production. The reason is obviously because O'Casey intended to portray a change that happens to men in war, a change reflected in all of them. In production, it was felt necessary to relate this change to the protagonist by having him appear anonymously, yet recognizably onstage. Dramatically, the audience must see the protagonist change or the play languishes. Its core is cut out. By attempting to emerge on



an Expressionist plane of ideality in Act II, O'Casey does not relate his change to his protagonist.

If O'Casey had considered it necessary to portray this moment of change from civilian to war-stricken veteran, and such a choice is certainly defensible, he would have to choose a dramatic method. Unattached from character, dramatic change shown lyrically was evaded by presenting an anonymous protagonist. Was Heegan really onstage is the unsolvable problem? O'Casey's answer is that all soldiers are Heegans. This is less an answer than an evasion, however. Arthur Miller is able to say that all men are Lomans, and Shakespeare is able to say that all men are Lears without resorting to lyricism.

In Act III, O'Casey returns to drama by presenting another moment of change in Heegan's growth. This phase of Heegan's development is no more irrelevant than that of the second act, but it is more successful because it is dramatized. The quarrel with the play is not that it utilizes different dramatic techniques, but one undramatic one. Gordon Bottomley's comment that in Act II, "Mr. O'Casey . . . opened new means of expression to English dramatists," is completely wrong. Act II prevents the play from being the integrated success that *The Plough and the Stars* was.

The return to drama in the last two acts, however, seems to me strong and effective. In fact, I find it difficult to understand the derogatory opinions of the Abbey Directors about these two acts, as the last seems to me to reach a level of intensity that goes beyond even the last act of *The Plough and the Stars*.

There are three chief movements in Act III. The first is between Sylvester and Simon; the second is primarily Susie's with Surgeon Maxwell as her foil; the final movement is again Heegan's, and structurally the Act repeats Act I. The act has occasionally been criticized because

Simon and Sylvester's appearance in the hospital is both unexplained and improbable. It seems a mistake to criticize a nonrealistic play on realistic grounds, however, and about as valid as criticizing *Alice in Wonderland* for containing improbabilities.

The pace of the act is leisurely for about two-thirds of the way, in O'Casey's usual manner. Through the seemingly irrelevant banter, he establishes situation, exposition, and mood. Also, in the early scenes, he keeps directing pointers at the ominously silent Heegan.

The long second scene with its tone of flippancy about human relationships between Susie and Surgeon Maxwell is monstrously counterpointed by the long leap to an intensely serious view of the same human relations in the last scene in which Heegan loses Jessie. As in the last moments of Act I, there is a bit of a chorus at the end. Here, it is composed of the placid and sure chant of the nuns off-stage and Harry's despairing, "God of the miracles, give the poor devil a chance, give the poor devil a chance." That agonized cry tossed against the remote and passionless Latin is certainly one of O'Casey's finest touches.

The play does not, however, depend on irony nearly so much as did the previous plays, although the juxtaposition of the scenes in the third and fourth acts is ironic, as are the appearances of the Visitor and the Staff Wallah in Act II. More ironic is the treatment of the parallel plot of Teddy Foran. This irony is especially evident when Act IV is compared with Act I. In Act I, Foran had terrorized his wife, torn up their apartment and forced her to flee under the bed in the Heegan's apartment, in a beautiful farcical scene. This farcical treatment is abruptly contrasted to the harsh and bitter control that Mrs. Foran exerts over the now blind and softened Teddy of Act IV.

Act IV is complicated and made up of a number of units of characters: Heegan, Jessie and Barney; Susie and

Maxwell; Sylvester, Simon and Mrs. Foran; Mrs. Foran and Teddy. In the act's last movement, all of the characters are related to and subsumed in the main action of Heegan as they were in Act I. O'Casey's touch is astonishingly deft as he first establishes the crippled Heegan in his wheel chair, following Jessie and Barney like a grim Nemesis, and then immediately counterpoints this action against a farcical music-hall turn, as the *Times* critic put it.

. . . Mr. O'Casey is working at his proper experiment, twirling his diamond, leaping suddenly from a music-hall turn at a telephone to a transcendental dialogue between a blind man and a cripple, giving to a dance at a football club an extraordinary tragic significance, matching a poem with a waltz.

The crucial scene is dominated by the symbolism of the tassie. Heegan returns it to the table, smashed and crippled as he is crippled. The play ends with a typical O'Caseyan chorus carried over from the second structure. Heegan and Foran chant:

The Lord hath given and man hath taken away.  
Blessed be the name of the Lord.

O'Casey counterpoints these statements with the waltz music which immediately begins and against Susie's eloquent and, to the audience, grim summation:

. . . Teddy Foran and Harry Heegan have gone to live their own way in another world. Neither I nor you can lift them out of it. No longer can they do the things we do. We can't give sight to the blind or make the lame walk. We would if we could. It is the misfortune of the war. As long as wars are waged, we shall be vexed by woe; strong legs

shall be made useless and bright eyes made dark. But we, who have come through the fire unharmed, must go on living . . . Come along, and take your part in life! . . . Come along, Barney, and take your partner into the dance!

By this speech the reason for O'Casey's diversity of method becomes more apparent. The play has momentarily gone beyond tragedy, behind and beyond what happened to Harry Heegan and far beyond the expected audience catharsis. Synge does the same thing in Maurya's speech in *Riders to the Sea*. There and here, it seems brutally effective. In addition to the unexpected emotional effect of the speech, O'Casey by it may draw a moral lesson. As Heegan became lost in Act II, he becomes for a time lost at the end of Act IV. Here is an aesthetically valid reason for the diversity of technique. Heegan is subsumed in still-alive man.

If Susie's speech took the audience out of the play and beyond the bounds of explicitness of traditional structure, Mrs. Foran's speech which ends the play returns us inside the framework again in a masterly manner:

It's a terrible pity Harry was too weak to stay an' sing his song, for there's nothing I love more than the ukelele's tinkle, trinkle in the night-time.

Mrs. Foran's speech is the dramatization of Susie's and reasserts the structure of the play by bringing the audience back into the Heegan action.

In *The Plough and the Stars* O'Casey had brought his gifts of irony and humor under a formal control. In *The Silver Tassie* he experimented in new forms, in juxtapositions of different methods against each other, and in the lyric Expressionism of Act II. That act is a *cul-de-sac*, but the rest of the play is a considerable achievement. As it

stands, I do not think that the play would hold the stage successfully, but there is no reason why it could not be presented minus the second act or possibly minus both middle acts. The story of Heegan would greatly gain in power, coherence, and ironic intensity. In its complete form the play asserts that O'Casey was not yet able to harness his diverse methods, but it also contains masterly bits.

O'Casey's next play, *Within the Gates*, had an unsuccessful production in London, but opened in New York at the National Theatre on October 22, 1934, with a great deal of advance fanfare. O'Casey was brought to New York to observe and assist in the production, and he has chronicled his New York adventures in *Rose and Crown*. O'Casey's appearance in New York was the signal for many interviews and much speculative comment on the arty and symbolic and highbrow play he had brought with him. O'Casey was fortunately voluble about his intentions although he spoke, as usual, in generalities and rarely touched upon specific matters of technique. *The New York Times* quotes him as having commented during the rehearsals of the London production:

I am out to destroy the accepted naturalistic presentation of character; to get back to the poetic significance of drama. We have a great heritage in the English language, and I feel that it is the theatre's mission to keep it alive. I do not want to appear egotistical, but if I have any aim it is to link modern drama with the great main stream of English literature. Or let me put it this way: I want to be influenced by the good and not by the bad.

O'Casey discussed his credo chiefly in an article in the *Sunday Times* on October 21, 1934, two days before the play opened. He felt that modern dramatists



. . . have pilloried drama too long to the form of dead naturalism, and all fresh and imaginatively minded dramatists are out to release drama from the pillory of naturalism and to send her dancing through the streets . . . We're out to put dancing and song back again where they belong and make the movements of the body express something quite as well as the sound of the voice.

His chief argument against naturalism was a realization of the artificiality of convention:

There can never be any actuality on a stage, except an actuality that is unnecessary and utterly out of place. An actor representing a cavalier may come on the stage mounted on a real horse, but the horse will always look ridiculous. The horse can have nothing to do with the drama . . . True to life on the stage, as far as drama is concerned, really means true to death. So to hell with so-called realism for it leads nowhere.

*Within the Gates* has little in it that could be called realistic. It is O'Casey's first completely Expressionistic play and is written, unlike the *Tassie*, in the same manner throughout. There is no juxtaposition of different styles and techniques. There is no need to make a mental effort to co-ordinate the various elements. The play has unity and structure.

Unity and structure are about all it has. O'Casey's initiating premise is so broad that perhaps it can not be even stated with certainty. The theme, as nearly as one can define it, is an affirmation of life. O'Casey's definitions of his symbolic characters in the *Times* are perhaps enough to indicate the romantic fuzziness that envelopes the play. For instance, O'Casey defines the Dreamer as the



symbol of a noble restlessness and discontent; of the stir in life that brings to birth new things and greater things than those that were before; of the power realizing that the urge of life is above the level of conventional morality; of ruthlessness to get near to the things that matter, and sanctify them with intelligence, energy, gracefulness and song; of rebellion against stupidity; and of the rising intelligence in man that will no longer stand, nor venerate, nor shelter those whom poverty of spirit has emptied of all that is worth while in life.

This is spirited language and noble thought, the kind of pronouncement that has made people love and admire O'Casey the man, but it is not a very specific or helpful characterization of a figure in a play. The explanations of the characters that O'Casey gives us are actually vaguer than the names of the characters themselves, like the Bishop, the Scarlet Woman, and the Atheist.

The central situation concerns the Young Whore and her search to find a vague, satisfying something in life. One sees again the spirit of Dion Boucicault stealing across the banal and hackneyed melodrama of the story and permeating the stock characterizations of such characters as the Bishop's sister, the conventional Aunt Tabitha spinster. (Here, incidentally, author and critic part ways. "I do not think," writes O'Casey in a letter, "that *Within the Gates* is banal.") The Young Whore does not know who her father is. The Bishop is strangely drawn to her, but refuses to help her when she most needs help. Later he relents, but it is too late and she dies. Meanwhile, it has become apparent to the Bishop—it was apparent to the audience from early in the first act—that the Young Whore is actually his daughter. But, proceeding from an essentially hackneyed situation and utilizing consistently

bald diction, and adding onto the structure the important and vague and romantic character of the Dreamer, O'Casey yet manages to concoct a passable, though, to my mind, a monstrously dull play. This is something of a feat, although one wonders what errant impulse caused the author to bedevil himself with so many restrictions. The answer would seem to lie in a distinct failure of the dramatist's unhone'd judgment. He attempts to work from meaning to exemplification, rather than as he did in the early plays, directly from well-wrought characters, who in their interaction grew into exemplifications of a developing meaning. In Yeats' phrase, there was no consuming dramatic fire, no reduction of the world to wallpaper. Lady Gregory's comment that O'Casey's character drawing was his forte seems well borne out by the failure of this play, which seems to be built up with artificiality and which lacks one individualized character.

The lack of a carefully articulated theme is well evidenced by the author's inclusion of a great cast of characters, each one satirical of a facet of reality that the author deplored: the ranting Salvation Army officer, the feckless Bishop, the policewoman, "symbol of woman dressed in a little brief authority." The effect is a certain diffusion of satire and a considerable confusion of purpose. In *The Plough and the Stars* O'Casey accomplished his broad satirical ends and avoided diffusion by having his characters strongly engaged in an action. The characters of *Gates* are static and uninvolved in a compelling action. It is not merely that they are abstractions—actually it becomes apparent finally that the Young Whore's name is Jannice, the Bishop's Gilbert, the Gardener's Ned, the Chair Attendants' 'erbert and Godfrey—but that they have no purpose. The author trots them out arbitrarily as wooden marionettes; they perform according to their morality play function; they exit.

O'Casey does, in fact, call the play a Morality in Four Acts. His term, I suppose, calls for clarification. A morality play like *Everyman* and an Expressionist play like *Gas* differ only in the more sophisticated technical devices that the latter will use and in the latter being frequently the more obvious production of a particular individual. Both are essentially based on the twofold vision of reality. There is an external real world and an internal or transcendental world of meaning and perfection. The morality play and the Expressionist play portray the external world by presenting only abstractions exemplified from the world of idea and value. They do not attempt, to use Eliot's term, to find an objective correlative. They stress meaning by avoiding actuality and attempting directly to portray meaning. An Expressionist play is a morality refurbished for modern times.

O'Casey's comment that he was searching for a new life for the theater composed of elements of the old realistic, classic, romantic, and Expressionist dramas seems a little imprecise and murky. What O'Casey essentially adds in this play, that is structurally revivifying, is his use of the dance. The chorus, which he uses overtly in the first two acts, had been used by the Expressionists. The dance or the ritual chant and dance, which he had used in the second act of the *Tassie*, and which he continues to use in this play, is in itself effective, but is still not strongly connected to action and character. It still remains more lyric than dramatic. In subsequent plays, like *Red Roses for Me*, he improves it, and in plays like *Purple Dust*, *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, and *The Bishop's Bonfire* he uses the dance integrally and stimulatingly and movingly. Here, it is still a debilitating technique.

Beyond that, the play is composed with a straight structure-of-action. The protagonist is Jannice, the Young Whore. The Exposition, Intrigue, Counterturn, and De-

nouement fall respectively into Acts I, II, III, and IV. The sort of excrescent character of the Dreamer is only the familiar figure of the *raisonneur* from the old well-made play. The other characters enter according to the demands of the situation at hand and are governed by the irony of situation that O'Casey utilized in his plays of the structure-of-character. The entrances and exits are not the ironically defined and meaningful ones of the structure-of-character plays simply because the characters cannot be truly ironic as they have little organic connection to the plot. It might also be said that the plot does not have a strongly organic connection to the theme, or, at least, that that connection is quite imperfectly articulated.

In O'Casey's article in the *Times*, the word "dance" was frequently mentioned. The new drama needs to be sent dancing in the streets. The drama, of course, originally sprang from the choral dance, but it needs to be stressed that what the drama originated from was not drama. Hardin Craig comments that the essentials of the drama are action, dialogue, and impersonation. And the essential impulse of the dance is not actually dramatic, to tell a story, but lyric, to celebrate an emotion. When O'Casey incorporates the dance into his plays, or even when he incorporates ritual, in fact whenever he merges into such abstractions, such lyricisms, such divergence from character into mass, his work becomes undramatic. He tells no story or he tells a dull story. In a similar manner, there are aridly undramatic moments in Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, precisely because of choral ritual.

Actually Craig's definition raises this central problem which debilitates the bulk of Expressionist plays: an Expressionist play, like other plays, has action and dialogue. How, though, is it possible to have impersonation in such plays? How can the actor impersonate an abstraction?

Critical comments on *Within the Gates* have, however,

varied from Brooks Atkinson's effusive, "Mr. O'Casey has written a great play . . . a drama that sweeps along through the loves and terrors of mankind . . . There is iron in its bones and blood in its veins and lustre in its flesh and its feet rest on the good brown earth," to Ashley Dukes's terse, "it utterly fails to . . . convince."

When Yeats said that he admired the play and suggested that the Abbey produce it, O'Casey tried to dissuade him for two excellent reasons. First, the play was beyond the Abbey's scope: the theatre had a tiny stage, and putting *Gates* on it would have been like trying to stuff an elephant in a hatbox. Second, and more important, O'Casey was himself dissatisfied with the play, and after the New York production "touched it up."

This revision after the play's production is fairly unusual. For instance, O'Casey commented in a letter to me that, though he thought it good, he was by no means satisfied with *The Bishop's Bonfire*; he did, however, not revise it. When I once ventured some criticisms—mistaken ones, I am now convinced—of the last act of *The Drums of Father Ned*, O'Casey replied that he would take a look at the act, but feared that there was nothing that could be done.

In other words, *Within the Gates* is an important play to O'Casey, and perhaps the reason for its importance is that it was a major creative effort, imaginatively large in scope and broad in theme. It is perhaps one of those works that passionately engaged writers ultimately wrestle with, and in which they attempt a kind of personal catharsis, a full and complete statement of their worldview.

D. H. Lawrence from time to time attempted such statements—notably in *The Rainbow*, which was to have been a Bible for the English people, and in *The Plumed Serpent*, which he at one time thought his best work. Yeats attempted to formulate a workable myth in his *Vision*, and Pound is perhaps attempting a major statement in his *Can-*



toes. To the artist the birth of such a work is probably an intense struggle, and the relief at its completion may make it assume for him the proportions of a *magnum opus*. I think that *Within the Gates* was such a work.

There are two ways to regard a play—as drama and as literature. If *Within the Gates* will not withstand the stern scrutiny one may give *The Plough and the Stars* or *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, there is yet the real probability that O'Casey's sense of the theatre has not deserted him. (I believe, incidentally, that it never has.) There is the probability that, given the production it deserves, the kind of production lavished upon Rodgers and Hammerstein, and the kind of production that evidently in New York it got, *Within the Gates* would still be, as it was, intensely theatrical and moving.

As drama may be either theatre or literature or both, the spectator may be either naive or critical or, paradoxically, both. But if the spectator is both, or if the play is able to entertain both highbrow and lowbrow, then you have a dramatic masterpiece.

Ibsen and Chekhov wrote literary masterpieces. Euripides and (Lord save me from the hoots and jeers) Boucicault wrote a few theatrical masterpieces. Sometimes Shakespeare, Molière, Shaw and O'Casey managed to write a play that was both.

I do not think that *Within the Gates* is both. Its terms are too simple, its fable too naive and its theme too bald to involve the spectator in that intellectually complex yet emotionally profound engagement that great art inevitably gives.

*Within the Gates* did not have an unsuccessful Broadway run, and many viewers found it deeply moving. I think that if a play like *Gates* is compelling, it succeeds because it appeals to an affective state outside its bounds and that it depends upon a sort of stock response and that much of its



appeal springs from inspired choreography and stage designing. I would say that O'Casey's excursion into Expressionism led him into a dramatic impasse. O'Casey does not agree, and, although author and critic are here at odds, I must in justice admit that O'Casey's sense of the drama seems to me one of the century's best. Perhaps the best comment that can be made was T. E. Lawrence's, after seeing *Within the Gates*:

Bless him again. He is a great man, still in movement. May it be long before he grows slow, stops, returns on his tracks! I have learned a great deal from him.

## 5

### PREACHER AND PROPHET

I am convinced that fine art is the subtlest, the most seductive, the most effective means of propagandism in the world, excepting only the example of personal conduct; and I waive even this exception in favor of the art of the stage . . .

*Shaw*

If a play is what it ought to be it must be a religious function.

*O'Casey*

Some writers, among them D. H. Lawrence and Sean O'Casey, find in the contradictory statements at the head of this chapter no contradiction. Mr. Eliseo Vivas in his article "The Two Lawrences" in a recent issue of *The Bucknell Review* points out that Lawrence was a man who could say with equal conviction that "The essential function of art is moral" and that "being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet . . . The novel is the one bright book of life. Books are not life. They are only tremulations on the ether. But the novel as a tremulation can make the whole man alive tremble." The intensity of experience for Lawrence was so great that he was compelled not to let that intensity illuminate his work by implication, but to exalt that intensity, which was only a minor fault, and finally to preach

and to harangue his readers for not attaining that pitch themselves. He was in turn the artist, the prophet, and the preacher, and too often the prophet and the preacher overcame the artist.

The situation is the same with Sean O'Casey. In his early work he was the artist, content to let his vision illuminate his action by implication. In *Within the Gates* and *Red Roses for Me*, he is the prophet, allowing his personal exaltation to rise to the surface of his plot. In *The Silver Tassie* and *The Star Turns Red*, he is the preacher, exhorting his viewers specifically and overtly upon a definite theme. Probably O'Casey's plays can only be understood by realizing that there are these three facets of the man. Sometimes one facet is in the foreground of a play, sometimes another, but only in O'Casey's final plays where he is able to compel a synthesis of the three is he as successful as he was in *The Plough and the Stars*.

In *The Star Turns Red* O'Casey turns from the personal prophecy of *Within the Gates* back to the specific preaching of *The Silver Tassie*. There are, of course, several differences between the *Star* and the *Tassie*. The *Star*, like *Within the Gates*, is almost completely Expressionistic, and, while in the *Tassie* O'Casey was expounding a personal indictment of war, in the *Star* he is working within the bounds of proletarian literature. O'Casey himself has grudgingly admitted that the play may be a bad one, and I would quite agree and class the play, together with *Within the Gates*, as his poorest work. The play appears to be an attempt at proletarian tragedy, perhaps partially impelled by O'Casey's admiration for Toller's *Masse Mensch*, and its failure can be best explained by the intentions and limitations of what Gorki called "social realism." William Empson in his *English Pastoral Poetry* quotes Gorki in a speech to the 1934 All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, which defines the formula of "social realism":

To invent means to extract from the totality of real existence its basic idea and to incarnate this in an image; thus we obtain realism. But if to the idea extracted from the real is added the desirable, the potential, and the image is supplemented by this, we obtain that romanticism which lies at the basis of myth and is highly useful in that it facilitates the arousing of a revolutionary attitude towards reality, an attitude of practically changing the world.

I do not feel capable of launching into a full-scale attack against this form of writing if, indeed, at this late date such a battle still needs to be fought. So I shall simply state my prejudices and pass on to the play. Gorki's "arousing of a revolutionary attitude" seems to me not only to turn the artist into a preacher but also to imply that characterization be falsified by a too simple presentation, a silhouette rather than a complete human being. This simplification seems to me what is basically false in *The Star Turns Red*. The play has too few human beings embroiled in its too predictable plot.

The play is written in one manner; it has the same tone throughout; it is completely stylized and qualifies as Expressionistic because it presents a heightened view of reality—actually a skeletal reality through which the meaning may shine more clearly as in a morality play. This thematic explicitness hurts the drama. The play is not set in a completely fantastic atmosphere of Foulstrand and Fairhaven, but is dedicated to the men and women who fought through the great Dublin lockout in 1913 and takes place in a specific place and at a specific historical time. The chief characters are even given names: Michael, Jack, Kian, Julia, Joybell, Brannigan, and Red Jim. Most of the minor characters are given stylized names: the Purple Priest, the Brown Priest, the Lord Mayor, the Old Woman, the Man

with a Crutch, the Hunchback, and the Woman with a Withered Child.

These two types of names suggest that the play is carried on in two parallel lines. The story of Jack and his relations to his brother, Kian, and to his sweetheart, Julia, suggests the broader struggle of Red Jim, the symbol of Communism against the Purple Priest, the symbol of the Church, and the Lord Mayor, the symbol of the State. This latter plot because it is the broadest should seem to be the most important, but the Jack plot dealing with characters that more closely approach human beings stands out in bolder relief. This fact suggests to me strongly what I consider to be a part of the essential nature of drama, that meaning must always be presented implicitly through real characters engaged in a significant action. O'Casey's action is certainly significant, but his theme is far from implicit and his characters are unreal.

The characters of the Jack plot are not characters in a normal sense. Rather they are puppets, like the zombies of the worst Lawrence novels who exist only to embody the theme. Stylized characters can scarcely embody human relationships convincingly or enthrallingly. For instance, in Act I, Kian, the brother who belongs to the Saffron Shirts, shoots down the father of his brother's fiancée, allows the fiancée, Julia, to be whipped, and threatens horrible vengeance on his brother, Jack. Kian has nine speeches in Act I, no speeches in Acts II and III, and three speeches in Act IV that embody his moment of illumination and, consequently, a partial reversal of his earlier beliefs. Twelve speeches spread over four long acts are scarcely sufficient to create a credible, much less a complex, human being. It would be beside the point to assert that Kian is treated expressionistically because any viewer cannot avoid relating even an expressionistic character to

reality. Expressionism only has validity and vitality when it does not contradict the reality it is extrapolated from.

In Act IV the plots become joined and the falsity becomes again destructively apparent. Julia's lover, Jack, has been killed in the fighting. Red Jim comforts the "silently crying Julia" with:

He's not too far away to hear what's happening. You'll nurse, now, a far greater thing than a darling dead man. Up, young woman, and join in the glowing hour your lover died to fashion. He fought for life, for life is all; and death is nothing!

Although the speech is artificial and melodramatic, it is, at least, dramatically defensible. Julia's reaction is not:

Julia stands up with her right fist clenched. The playing and singing of "The Internationale" grow louder. Soldiers and sailors appear at the windows, and all join in the singing.

O'Casey would say that the manner of the scene is that of heightened reality. I do not believe that the characterization in the scene has any connection with reality. A viewer or reader will accept a skeleton character only as long as the rest of that character may be implied by empathy and as long as the character's actions are humanly consistent. The characters in *Arms and the Man*, for instance, are little more than the skeletal types of *The Star Turns Red*, but in the Shaw play the abstraction "Common-Sense," embodied in Bluntschli, makes no gestures that are not humanly characteristic. The viewer is able to accept the caricature and to fill in the character. One cannot fill in Julia because her reactions are not human. O'Casey made his point with Bessie Burgess and Juno; he does not make it with Julia.

*The Star* is the closest to straight propaganda that



O'Casey has written, and it is his poorest play. The structure is somewhat muddled because O'Casey inserts extraneous incidents in a play built upon two parallel traditional structures. By these intrusive actions, O'Casey seems to be attempting some of the broadness of the second structure, and considered by themselves some of these external incidents are more dramatically effective than some of the necessary scenes. The play's first scene, for instance, between the Old Woman and the Old Man is excellent because O'Casey for the moment forgets propaganda and delineates character. The next scene, between Kian and Jack, is completely flat and ineffective because O'Casey returns to his propagandistic thesis with a vengeance. The characters mouth only platitudes. Jack chants:

I love thee, red soldier, red soldier, red soldier,  
Standing between us and our bold enemy,  
Thy hand on a rifle, red star in thy helmet,  
And th' workers' red flag flying high over thee.

And Kian answers:

Your red soldier's day is done; his teeth are broken in his mouth; the bayonets of the brave are searching out his bowels; he runs hither and thither, knowing no way out of the blaze that is melting him as a snail melts in a forest fire! Our Leader's new order will overwhelm the living world!

There is no real dramatic clash here because there are no characters. There is only disembodied opinion. Presumably the play taught O'Casey the difficulties of proceeding so far into didacticism, for never again does he stray so far from character.

A fault of proletarian literature is that it takes itself too seriously. With a firm belief in its rightness and nobility,

it is unable to laugh at its foibles. Irony has no chance to function. One of the factors of Shaw's success, and of O'Casey's in his best plays of the second structure, is that he is able to regard his theme from more than one view, a quality that creates considerable dramatic tension. In *The Star* it is only when O'Casey is able to forget his theme that he is able to lose his high seriousness.

The best scene of Act I has no organic connection to plot or to theme but is successful in itself. I refer to the scene between Julia and Joybell, the sanctimonious church functionary. When she taunts Joybell and he virtuously and ridiculously ignores her and then, driven too far, attacks and frightens her, the dramatist's point is made implicitly as it should be. The scene is held tightly by the ironic reversal and is highly comic. Joybell, as all good characters must, stands for something, but the something is ingrained in his personality.

The act's last scene returns to the abstractly heightened representation of humanity. Michael, learning the Purple Priest has sent Julia to be whipped, rushes in and is shot. Julia's whipping is a sensational bid for pity and a piece of dramatic card-stacking that is more reminiscent of Spillane than O'Casey. Further, Michael's death speech seems straight out of a bad Russian movie:

Jack, comrade, keep little Julia near you. She's all I've got, and all I've got I give to you. Now, my fist—close it . . . Now, my arm—raise it, lift it high. . . . Lift it up, lift it up in the face of those murdering bastards—the Clenched Fist!

Act II touches only incidentally on the Jack plot. It presents the Red Jim plot, the broader view of the struggle, by showing Jim's difficulties with greedy and treacherous union officials. The act is moderately good because of the characterization of Brannigan and the defeat of the straw

men—English, Caheer, Sheasker, and Brallain. Brannigan is the most convincing character in the play. His first entrance is reminiscent of the delightful drunken entrance of O'Casey's one-act farce, *A Pound on Demand*. What humor is in the act is, however, well negated by the abstractions of the Purple Priest and the Brown Priest of the Poor and of Red Jim, a portrait of Jim Larkin, a union leader in the 1919 strike.

Act III returns to the Jack plot and attempts to gain a certain pathos by representational characters entering to mourn over Michael's body—the Man with the Crutch, the Most Respectable Man, the Young Man with a Cough, the Blind Man. When the Purple Priest and Red Jim appear, the rest of the act degenerates into the platitudes of propaganda, like, "Long live the march of the militant workers!"

The last act concludes the conflict with the Red Soldiers defeating Church and State, but with Jack dying and Julia bravely swathing herself in the red flag and looking forward to a new and better day, in accordance with Gorki's "social realism." There is a pleasant but too brief oasis of comedy in the act when two workmen decorate the Mayor's house for a ball, comedy reminiscent of the incorrigibly lazy and incompetent workers of *Purple Dust* and *The Bishop's Bonfire*: just enough of a hint to remind us that the play is by O'Casey.

After *The Plough and the Stars* the structure of this play, with its two simple plots, one general and one more specific, is baldly simple and scarcely experimental. I find the language, if anything, worse than that of *Within the Gates*. The characterization is negligible. So let us turn to O'Casey's other "red" play, *Red Roses for Me*. *Me* is apt, for these are recognizably O'Casey's roses. The monotone of the Communist journalist has changed, thank God, back to the rich, racy, Dublin brogue we know. *Red Roses* is perhaps the most popular play of what has been called

O'Casey's "barren years." It was produced on Broadway in the 1955-56 season, received mixed reviews and after a slow start played to full houses before it had to vacate the Booth Theatre to make way for a play about brainwashing which never should have escaped from television. *Red Roses* is about thirty-seven times better drama than *The Star Turns Red*. In it O'Casey is chiefly the prophet, only negligibly the preacher, and even sometimes again the artist. The characterization is not weakened by the necessities of propaganda although the character of the protagonist, Ayamonn Breydon, because of O'Casey's fervor about the good life, tends toward the fuzziness of his spiritual ancestor, the Dreamer of *Within the Gates*. The exaltation of O'Casey the Prophet also does some curious things to the play's essentially traditional structure.

For instance, half of the play is Exposition. Act I gives the exposition of the play's major plot, but most of the action in this act and in the second has little pertinence for the major plot. Much of the action is not organic. The major plot traces Ayamonn's successful efforts to divest himself of all relationships that hinder his desire to help the worker. This action shows Ayamonn denying the pleas of his sweetheart, the pleas of his mother, and his attachment to art, so that he may selflessly help in the protest strike. The characters of Brennan o' the Moor, Roory O'Balacau and Mullcanny have no essential connection with the development of this major plot. They neither further nor hinder it. Of course, these characters are not pointless; they illustrate various of O'Casey's beliefs and their existence is an attempt to broaden the play by distilling into it themes not raised by the major action. Not since *The Plough and the Stars* had O'Casey been able, fully and didactically, to increase the intellectual range of a play. These additional viewpoints were a source of looseness and confusion in *Within the Gates*; that the conventional viewer regards

them more tolerantly in this play can be attributed to their greater wit, charm and fullness. Brennan o' the Moor is so immensely better than, for instance, 'erbert of *Within the Gates* that O'Casey almost sweeps the conventional play-goer into a quite unconventional acceptance.

Brennan, incidentally, has another function at the end of the play—to evoke by song a lyric, an ineffable final emotion. I would merely point out that Brennan's song, despite my admiration for it and the last scene, is as extrinsic to the plot as Tennessee Williams' soft lights and background music. I do not think that you can honestly achieve by mood what you have not achieved by plot.

The first act is poorly structured for two reasons. The quarrel between Ayamonn and Sheila is not truly resolved, for it appears in exactly the same terms in Act II. Precisely the same things are said. Plot demands change and growth; here there is only static repetition.

Further, the Exposition must end by a beginning into the action. The first act ending of most plays is a high note, is exciting, and arouses curiosity if not suspense. If the well-made-play didacticism of this last statement seems naive, I would merely point out that, probably fortunately, the drama is still pretty naive. The ending of Act I of *Red Roses for Me* has seemingly a two-fold carry-over into the Intrigue . . . One is false because it is a choral action that, unlike the choral action of a Chekhov play, does not derive from the main action, but motivates it. The other is merely a lyric exultation.

The disappearance of the statue of our Lady of Eblana creates a certain amount of suspense and mystery at the end of Act I. This suspense is immediately cleared up at the very beginning of Act II when Brennan o' the Moor enters with the statue newly painted. This action is essentially a minor foray, a small excrescent sub-plot, having no connection with the main action. It is immediately solved



and over with. The end of the act in a structure-of-action play should involve the main action. This tie-over utilizing an unimportant sub-plot is poor dramaturgy. Also, it seems quite debatable whether a chorus, which is essentially a static thing, functioning as commentator usually, can be involved in a distinct action of its own. If the attempt is made, the danger of muddying the main action arises. The main action certainly seems muddled at the end of Act I in *Red Roses*.

The Act's second carry-over is the lyric chant of Ayamonn and Roory:

Then out to th' place where th' battle is bravest,  
 Where th' noblest an' meanest fight fierce in th' fray,  
 Republican banners shall mock at th' foemen,  
 An' Fenians shall turn a dark night into day!  
 . . . Th' Fenians are in force again, Ayamonn; th' Sword o'  
 Light is shinin'!

Here again is not only the lyric and proletarian influence, but also the banal diction of O'Casey's worst moments.

Act II does not begin the Intrigue. Nothing important has happened in the interval between acts. Little important happens in the act which is mostly made up of extrinsic incident. There is a second quarrel between Ayamonn and Sheila which merely recapitulates the first and ends as inconclusively. Perhaps some advance is made in the delineation of Ayamonn's character when he replies to Sheila's, "Or lose me; and you wouldn't like that to happen," with, "I shouldn't like that to happen; but I could bear the sthrain." As nothing for three-fourths of the act occurs to jar the plot into conflict, it seems that the act is little more than an extension of the Exposition. I think it is excellent Exposition but, agreeing with Aristotle that action is the heart of the drama, I do not think that half of a successful play can be Exposition.



The first two static acts emphasize the second chief fault of the play, the static character of the hero. Ayamonn has nothing wrong with him in Act I and he grows progressively nobler. Ayamonn stands for what is noblest in O'Casey the man and dumbest in O'Casey the dramatist. Like D. H. Lawrence's gamekeepers, Ayamonn is too artificial, too much the *raisonneur*. I believe that the dramatist should hold the mirror up to nature, but I believe also that the clearest mirrors are cracked ones that show flaws. Ayamonn is a combination of Red Jim and Christ and the president of the local Browning society. He is at times more appealing and more interesting than the one-dimensional Jim, but he is never acutely believable as the three-dimensional Fluther or Captain Boyle or even Harry Heegan. He says a few "damns," but otherwise he is one of nature's noblemen, a romantic hero on the side of truth and beauty and the downtrodden masses. The dramatist never really actualizes an individual in the dialogue and in the action. In Act III O'Casey attempts to render Ayamonn more real by getting inside his mind. In the drama it is extremely difficult to get inside the mind, as Strindberg's influential, but virtually unactable and unacted dream plays suggest.

The remainder of Act II is largely made up of two movements. One is concerned with the small riot over Mullcanny, which Ayamonn and his mother heroically avert. The irony of Brennan, Roory, and Mullcanny, cowering on the floor and arguing over Darwinism while stones crash through the windows, is a fine comic touch, reminiscent of the best of the structure-of-character plays. The fine scene, however, has no connection with the previous or the following scenes and certainly none with the main action.

Many critics reported a disjunctive feeling in seeing the play. To return to the metaphor of Charles Morgan, re-

viewing *The Silver Tassie* in *The London Times*, the feeling of seeing a jewel being tossed in the air and revealing its different facets in the sun. In this instance there was no jewel, but several pebbles, some of them muddy. Bentley comments:

In fact, the simple story, not very well told, occupies but a small part of the evening. The time is taken up by what I can only call dramaturgic decoration, some of which is so good that it almost redeems the play and certainly justifies the occasion, some of it so bad that at best one is bored . . .

To be fair, the "expressionism" of *Red Roses* goes beyond the portrait of a single man. Accused in his early days of merely stringing scenes and skits and songs together, as in a revue, O'Casey tries in the later plays to build the music, dancing, and incidental fun, into the structure of the whole—to the point, indeed, where these elements impose and *are* the structure, and it is the narrative which is incidental. I do not know whether such an attempt, in the drama, could ever succeed; plot, says Aristotle, is the soul of the drama.

Bentley's statement is to the point, but it would have greater force if the most important bit of the play to O'Casey were not Ayamonn and his struggle. Hence, there is a contradiction and a division of purpose. There is a desire for the broadness of the structure of character and for the singleness and force of the single protagonist and single main action of the structure of action. The two structures are mutually exclusive; the two desires are incompatible. Unity in such disjunctiveness is about impossible, and it is unity through tension that is essential to the depth and force of the catharsis. Harold Clurman, however, feels:

Unity is given it by the melancholy sweet and sour mood in which everything is enveloped. Therefore we are not

shocked—as we so often are in some of O’Casey’s other work—when a scene of acrid folk farce alternates with a formal approach verging on grandiloquence. The truth and style here are not that of objective fact but of an atmosphere, at once misty and penetrating, in which sentiment and image mingle as in a kind of awful but cherished nightmare.

I find it difficult to discover how a juxtaposition of the sweet and the sour or the misty and the penetrating is conducive to unity and, indeed, find no unity in the play other than the thin thread of the poorly told, grotesquely proportioned story of Ayamonn.

Without structural coherence, without organic form to bind its separate parts tensely together, the fine Roory, Brennan, and Mullcanny scene could just as well be cut for another, on any topic the author would care to consider, or for none.

The last movement of the act finally gets around to the end of the Exposition, the valid carry-over instead of the artificial ones at the end of Act I. The Rector and the Railwaymen enter and explain the strike situation to Ayamonn. He then says, “The Minstrel Show must be forgotten,” and resolves to throw everything aside to engage actively in the strike.

The act then ends with a semicircle of men and the three women, Eeada, Dympna, and Finnoola, singing:

Oh, Queen of Eblana’s poor children,  
Bear swiftly our woe away,  
An’ give us a chance to live lightly  
An hour of our life’s dark day.

These people become the choral background, exemplifying the human misery that motivates Ayamonn.

Act III is almost entirely lyric. In a normal structure of

action play, the Intrigue should follow the Exposition. In *Red Roses for Me*, the Intrigue is pushed back into Act IV where it is so telescoped that it is difficult to determine if it really exists.

The principal movement of the act shows Ayamonn bringing hope and life and beauty to the chorus by momentarily transforming the world of Dublin. By this means, O'Casey attempts to present lyrically what he has earlier failed to present dramatically—the importance of Ayamonn's motivation, the importance of Ayamonn as a savior and a man of good will, and the importance of his vision and broad humanity which have certainly not emerged in the first two acts. Partly this fault is structural through O'Casey's selectivity; partly it is because of the nature of his material: it is difficult to portray vision and broad humanity even through a romantic hero, if that hero is set in a prosaic setting instead of on a wind-tossed mountain top. It is doubly difficult if the hero is a young man, enthusiastic and haphazardly self-educated.

Two objections can be made against the act. The first is that nothing dramatic happens; the main action is derailed for the lyric interlude. The second is that the scene, if it succeeds, succeeds by stage magic. The magic is not the magic of the dramatist, but that of the choreographer, the electrician, and the set designer. If unity is essential to drama, the act may be attacked because it attempts to incorporate a form into the drama which is alien. This is not to deny the utility of song or of dance—O'Casey has occasionally used both to fine effect—but to suggest that they must be utilized in small enough quantities to be digested by the rest of the production. They must be an outgrowth of the drama, rather than a substitute for it.

Act IV re-emphasizes the awry structure of the play. The first scene between the Rector and Samuel is used

for exposition primarily about the characters of Dowzard and Foster which are here for the first time introduced and which take up a large portion of the act. It is not that the characters are poor exemplifications of O'Casey's point; it is that this particular point belongs in another play. Dowzard and Foster occupy the stage at the crucial moment when the main action is coming to its climax offstage.

Ayamonn is actually onstage for only three pages of the act. He has a short emblematic clash with the Inspector, who was introduced in Act III. This clash seems the only indication of an Intrigue in the play. The lack of an Intrigue suggests that the story is not the material for a full-length play. The story is too simple and too short. The quarrel between Ayamonn and the Inspector prophesies the real battle which presently takes place offstage. The sound of the bugle and of charging horses offstage is the Counterturn of the main action. Shortly after, Finnoola appears and relates how Ayamonn was killed. The curtain is lowered and the second scene of the act is a long, muted Denouement.

The lowering of the curtain signalizes the passage of a few hours. Dividing the last act of a play into two scenes is perhaps as experimental or as amateurish as is possible. It is the last act of a play, more than any of the preceding, which should have a swift and unimpeded motion. But because O'Casey crowds so much of the structure of the play into the first scene of Act IV, he must break the action by lowering the curtain, for there is no other way to create his final mood of calm after all passion is spent.

There are three movements in the second scene. The Rector dresses down Dowzard and Foster, Sheila throws Inspector Finglas over, and Brennan sings a final sad dirge to Ayamonn whose body is lying in the chapel. The final



mood O'Casey wants to produce is this sadness at Ayamonn's death, and he does it in a nondramatic manner to produce mood, by song. Brennan sings:

A sober black shawl hides her body entirely,  
 Touch'd be th' sun an' th' salt spray of th' sea;  
 But down in th' darkness a slim hand, so lovely,  
 Carries a rich bunch of red roses for me!

This verse is, although a trifle early-Yeatsian, one of the best in the play. But, at any rate, O'Casey does not attempt a catharsis dramatically from the integral elements of the play, but by the pathos of a darkened stage, a light from the church, and a sad melody.

The curious structure of the play occurs not because O'Casey is a blunderer, incapable of effective construction, for in *The Plough and the Stars* he had shown himself to be the master of a much more intricate structure. The curious structure derives from a curious esthetic. Consider this comment from the essay "Tender Tears for Poor O'Casey":

. . . it isn't the question of the goodness or badness of a play that is the important thing; it is . . . the idea that the drama must change and develop a new outlook, a broader scope, and a fresh style, if it is to live as an art . . .

I couldn't agree more that the drama has got to slough off its dead skin of pseudo-Ibsenism, but bad experimentation is no answer. And how would you know whether an experiment is bad until you tried it? I suppose that you can't know precisely whether an experiment will work, but, by your taste and judgment formed by your broad knowledge of dramatic literature and its criticism, you ought to be



able to get a pretty fair notion that some experiments would be profitable and some would not.

For instance, the experiment of this play's structure. How can I imply throughout this book that traditional structure is the bane of the modern drama and then censure O'Casey for experimenting with new combinations of that structure? And that is just what O'Casey is doing—not experimenting with a new structure as he was in *The Plough*, but tinkering with an old one. That old one served well for centuries and it has much to teach us, and when Aristotle said that a drama should have a beginning, a middle and an end he put his finger right upon what traditional structure can chiefly teach us—the proportions of a story. I think that when you tinker with the proportions of a story, as O'Casey does in *Red Roses*, you are only flirting with failure. We cannot simplify traditional structure; it is simple. But without destroying its proportions, we can give it complexity. The drama has been traditionally one of the most naive of the arts, catering to the man in the street. In our time that naïveté has become bitterly evident and possibly because the man in the street—let us call him Willie Loman—has become by the nature of events disturbed, if not, indeed, somewhat aware. The second structure is one alternative, and there may be others, but I do not think that the structure of *Red Roses* is among them.

What may one say for *Red Roses*? The same, I think, that one said of *The Silver Tassie*—spots of magnificent dialogue, of firm characterization and of inimitable humor. And, in addition, if O'Casey had not created "theater," he had given stimulus to a set designer to create stage magic.

And, finally, why expend so much energy on a play that I think is unsuccessful? Because, no matter what Sean O'Casey says, the question of the goodness or badness of

a play *is* the important thing. And because we have a right to demand of one of the few people in our age capable of creating a dramatic masterpiece, why in this case he did not. If the answer is that he was too much the preacher and prophet, I could not agree more grimly with George Jean Nathan that "The two worst influences on present-day playwrights are, very often, Strindberg and Communism."

## 6

### FARCE, AND FANTASY

O'Casey called *Purple Dust*, which he published in 1940, "a wayward comedy." The "wayward" is apt because the play resists a conventional label, but John Gassner is probably close when he calls it a "poetic and symbolic farce." There is a provocative contradiction between the adjectives and the noun in this definition even. And reading *Purple Dust*, one becomes aware that the play is no normal farce, but a curious experiment with the form of farce.

There has been no definitive commentary on the nature of this most popular form of dramatic humor, and it would be both presumptuous and unnecessary for me to attempt to probe the genre very deeply here. But because O'Casey's is one of the few notable and successful attempts to use the genre artistically rather than solely as entertainment, I shall state as briefly as I can what seem, by common consent and current practice, its chief characteristics.

There are two major differences between comedy and farce: in comedy, theme is integral; in farce there is only a token theme like "Honesty is the best Policy" or "Good shall triumph over Evil," so much a token theme that there is really no theme. Second, real character is satirically examined in comedy—for instance, Falstaff, Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, Tartuffe, Marchbanks, Captain Boyle, Monsieur Verdoux; in farce pseudo characters like the fat man,

the pompous man, the gossip woman, the bald-headed man, the half-wit, and the Negro are the *Dramatis Personae*.

Besides a stock theme and stock characterizations, farce is noted for its stock situations—the lover hidden under the bed, the overheard conversation, the comic misunderstanding. But probably farce's most notable quality is its action. As Diderot says in his *De la Poesie Dramatique*:

You cannot put too much action and movement into a farce. . . . Less in gay comedy, still less in Serious comedy, and almost none at all in tragedy.

The less true to life a type is, the easier the task of making it rapid in action, and "warm." You have heat at the expense of truth and what is beautiful in human nature. The most tedious thing imaginable is a burlesque and cold play.

A great pure farce has probably never been written; however, there have been impure farces that were much more than entertainment, and it might be profitable to consider why. I have in mind particularly the great Chaplin movies like *City Lights*, *Modern Times*, and *The Great Dictator*. When the tramp, for instance, is tormented by small boys pulling his underwear out through a hole in his pants, we have essentially a heightened and absurd farcical situation. This situation is surrounded by scenes of a pathetic nature which broaden the character of the tramp and create a great deal of sympathy for him. In other words, Chaplin transcends farce in his best work by incorporating into his film elements from other genres and juxtaposing melodrama or pathos against exaggerated humor. As Chekhov and O'Casey in their best work never wrote a pure tragedy or a pure comedy, Chaplin in his best work did not create a pure farce; all three created a few impure masterpieces of tragi-comedy or pathetic-farce.

The techniques of farce can be blended with techniques from other genres and can give, as in Molière, great moments in the theater. *Purple Dust*, I think, in its year's run off-Broadway showed that it could give one of those moments.

The situation of the play is not a particularly new one. It had been treated as early as 1906 by O'Casey's great friend and contemporary, Bernard Shaw, in his *John Bull's Other Island*. Shaw's hero, Tom Broadbent, had come to Ireland full of English aplomb and assurance and had been consistently duped, tricked, and ridiculed by the Irish. Broadbent retained considerably more dignity than do O'Casey's pair of heroes, Stokes and Poges. Shaw, of course, was never one to put up a weak straw man. His straw men have usually much verve and force. Shaw understood the principle of pitting nearly equal forces against each other. It becomes obvious, for example, in the Hell scene of *Man and Superman* that Shaw regarded the devil's position as a wrong one. The devil, however, is no mere dupe of the author's. He holds his own in argument; his ripostes are shrewd, suave, and sly. O'Casey, however, does not mind playing with a stacked deck. The deck is, of course, stacked in all dramas although the measure of success of a play is usually determined by the extent to which the dramatist conceals his hand. O'Casey in his poorer plays, like *Within the Gates* and *The Star Turns Red*, does not allow the opposition to take even a trick. If there is only a token conflict in a serious play, there must be some strong quality to take its place. Usually this one-sidedness is dramatically vitiating. *The Star Turns Red* and *Red Roses for Me* are good cases in point.

In a farcical situation, however, as can readily be seen from a perusal of such Molière plays as *The School for Wives* and *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, where the primary intention is ridicule, it is appropriate for right and reason to



be entirely on one side and only foolishness forcefully asserted to be on the other. The farcical situations in the O'Casey play provide the greatest difference between it and *John Bull's Other Island*, a play in what has essentially come to be known almost as a genre in itself, the Shavian comedy. Except in one offstage action in the Shaw play when Broadbent attempts to return the pig in his automobile, *John Bull's Other Island* follows fairly closely the rules of most Shavian discussion dramas.

*Purple Dust* contains a large number of farcical situations, but it is differentiated from a farce primarily by purpose. The play intends to be a lampoon of the British character. And to this extent, it is raised from the level of farce to approach that of serious comedy. Because of its purpose, its stock Englishmen are, while essentially the type characters one has come to associate with farce, given a somewhat broader relevance because of the various English traits they must necessarily display. A typical character of farce will display only one character trait.

Also the emphasis in *Purple Dust* is divided equally between the situation for itself and the satiric motivation for the various situations. In a pure farce, the initiatory force is merely something to be accomplished as quickly and painlessly as possible, so that the chase sequence of the Intrigue may commence. The beauty of a farce is, in fact, the Intrigue. The farce's beginning and ending are apt to be, respectively, dull and banal. In O'Casey's satirically initiated farcical situations, the ending of the play is considerably more vital because of its necessity to the play's theme.

There are a number of other elements that are alien to pure farce in *Purple Dust*. The plot structure, for instance, whenever it does intrude, is considerably more complex than the usual one main action of the pure farce with its moderately complex intrigue. Extremely curious is the technique of the inner and outer action which O'Casey



and Chekhov had used in their structure of character plays. Such a structure would seem utterly debilitating to the necessity of one principal action that the farce requires, to be most successful. As the outer action of *The Plough and the Stars* was the 1916 uprising and the inner action the manner in which the characters attempted to cope with reality, in *Purple Dust* the outer action is the attempt to refurbish the old Irish mansion and the inner action is the dual love plot of Cyril-Souhaun-2nd Workman and Poges-Avril-O'Killigain. The two inner parallel love plots proceed on a simplified structure of action, while around the outer action are hung the many and diverse incidents that would logically derive from the situation. The great diversity of incidents that may be connected to this outer action, then, is an extremely clever device. It provides the chief farcical elements of the play, and it is necessary for a farce to have a large number of these absurd situations growing progressively out of the main action. O'Casey is able to achieve the broadness of the structure of character and to avoid the necessity for the progressive nature of the one simple plot, with all of its situations causally connected, by this utilization in a modified sense of his technique of *The Plough and the Stars*.

Indeed, *Purple Dust* is O'Casey's finest structural achievement since *The Plough and the Stars*. It is an achievement in a minor genre, but it must be remembered that farce had been for years and assuredly still is in a structural strait jacket. Because of the success of the structure of the play, *Purple Dust* has a unity and coherence that O'Casey's other experiments, even the often superb *Silver Tassie*, did not have. If the elements of farce are to be utilized in art, such a reshuffling is certainly necessary, and one might wish O'Casey's form would be assimilated by the modern theater.

It is evident, then, that O'Casey by adding to and by

warping and re-arranging is changing the nature of farce, assimilating other elements into it, broadening it so that it may carry the weight of satire. It is surprising that he has built so successfully on such a flimsy scaffolding. Actually, the more one compares the structure of the play with that of typical farces, the more the form of *Purple Dust* appears masterly.

O'Casey's changes are not only structural, but sometimes wed diverse elements to farce. For instance, musical comedy, while another genre, often is based on a farcical situation. In Act I, Scene ii, O'Casey achieves a widening that yet remains in tone with the remainder of the play, by a musical-comedy song and dance. O'Casey is least gifted as a poet, but the verses in this scene hit the right tone of the ridiculous that throughout adheres to Stokes and Poges. Absolved of the necessity of seriousness, O'Casey's verse is effective. Stokes and Poges with their mistresses and servants enter dancing, dressed in rural costumes and singing:

Rural scenes are now our joy:  
Farmer's boy,  
Milkmaid coy,  
Each like a newly-painted toy,  
In the bosky countrie!

Our music, now, is the cow's sweet moo,  
The pigeon's coo,  
The lark's song too,  
And the cock's shrill cock-a-doodle-doo,  
In the bosky countrie!

The Irish workmen look on astonished, and this basic Irish-English division furnishes the situations that make up the bulk of the play. In Act I, the attempt to sell "genuine

poulthry . . . that lay with pride an' animation . . . enterprisin' hins," the attempt of the Irish to foist off a cow, and Basil's ignominious fall from the horse are the principal diversions. In Act II, the reconstruction of the house has proceeded somewhat, but the battle continues in the incidents of the workman who pokes a large hole in the ceiling, the cow in the hallway, the "Cambodian" vases, the gigantic grass roller, one roll of which not only suffices for the whole season, but for every season, and which eventually escapes from Stokes, pulling him through a wall, and finally Poges' mistaken shooting of the cow for a bull. Poges sums up the situation:

Oh, what a terrible country to have anything to do with! My precious vase is gone, my beautiful bowl is broken; a wall's demolished, and an innocent animal's shot dead; what an awful country to be living in! A no-man's land; a waste land; a wilderness!

In Act II the principal conflicts of the outer action are the Canon's extracting money from Stokes, the workmen's knocking part of the door down and walking over the top of Poges' quattrocento bureau with hobnail boots, to bring it into the room, and the final twofold defeat of the English by the Irish.

This union of the outer and inner actions occurs when O'Killigain and the 2nd Workman entice Stokes and Poges' mistresses, Souhaun and Avril, away, and when Stokes and Poges are deserted by the Irish as the flood waters pour into the living room, and they scramble to the roof to form a raft from the quattrocento bureau. The English, then, are defeated in both the outer and inner actions. Poges wails as the curtains close and the waters stream in:

My poor little quattrocento, the waters are about to cover thee! My comfort's gone, and my house of pride is straining

towards a fall. Would to God I were in England now that winter's here.

Within the play O'Casey had practically run the comic gamut, from several fine Abbott and Costello, "Who's on first?" routines to high satire. He had also found a method for stringing together the discordantly different comic incidents that *Juno* and *The Plough* had evidenced as his forte. Barzun comments that O'Casey

. . . may think *The* [sic] *Purple Dust* a high intellectual farce which gives the victory to youth and love, but it is as a whole a sadistic persecution of bungling Philistinism. That it makes its points, none the less is a sign of O'Casey's mastery in weaving, not in cutting, his cloth.

One would gather from the connotations of Mr. Barzun's words that "bungling Philistinism" should be given a measure of respect. Satire is always in a sense persecution, and if one labels O'Casey's presentation of the likable fools, Stokes and Poges, "sadistic," what then is Johnson's *Volpone* or Molière's *Le Misanthrope*? What word must one coin for *Gulliver's Travels*? Eric Bentley, speaking of O'Casey, said that, "The fun in which nine tenths of his genius finds expression creates a dream world of sublime infantility." It is this infantility, the concern in his great comic scenes with the irrelevant, the whimsical, the confused, and the violently misinformed, that is certainly one of the finest dramatic insights of the modern theater. *Purple Dust* is composed of such scenes, as is to a minor extent O'Casey's treatment of the second World War, *Oak Leaves and Lavender*.

*Oak Leaves and Lavender* was published in 1946 and first produced at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London, in May, 1947. The play invites comparison both

thematically and technically with his play of the first war, *The Silver Tassie*. Indeed, the comparison is insisted upon by O'Casey's subtitle, "A World [sic] on Wallpaper." The term is from Yeats who had written in his famous letter refusing *The Silver Tassie* that:

The mere greatness of the World War has thwarted you; it has refused to become mere background, and obtrudes itself upon the stage as so much dead wood that will not burn with the dramatic fire. Dramatic action is a fire that must burn up everything but itself; there should be no room in a play for anything that does not belong to it; the whole history of the world must be reduced to wallpaper in front of which the characters must pose and speak.

It would seem, then, that O'Casey suggests that in *Oak Leaves and Lavender*, he fulfills Yeats' prerequisites for a good play. It is certainly true that the world is reduced to a backdrop before which the players comport themselves. Through the window are seen, from time to time, the fires of battle, and intermittently a swastika lights up on the wireless set as an announcer's voice breaks into the dialogue. Often also, cries of soldiers and tramping feet of marching men are heard offstage. The room in Dame Hatherleigh's house becomes a pace removed from the war, a stage on which the characters may retire from the off-stage actions and display their attitudes and reactions. It is more questionable, however, if dramatic fire or a technical device of the playwright's has reduced the world to wallpaper. In the usual sense of the term, dramatic fire derives from the fierce involvement of various characters in a story. While an audience or reader would certainly seem to be held by the various incidents occurring onstage, the rather diffuse nature of the structure of character as it is used in this play, coupled with the aura of fantasy with



which O'Casey envelopes the action, lessens intensity. Probably in only one spot in the play does O'Casey approach this dramatic fire, and that is in the impassioned speech of Feelim late in the last act.

In *Purple Dust* O'Casey had been a critic and satirist. The critic and satirist is always to a degree isolated. In *Oak Leaves and Lavender* O'Casey attempts to identify himself with the great mass of humanity fighting against Germany. Russia had become an ally of Britain; why not O'Casey? In the character of Feelim there seems to be a personal uniting; in the character of Drishogue, Feelim's son, an ideological one. Drishogue is, like Ayamonn, a sort of a Communist, and when Edgar, Dame Hatherleigh's son, asks which England he shall fight for—

There are so many of them: Conservative England, Liberal England, Labour England, and your own Communist England—for which of them shall I go forth to fight, and, perchance, to die?

Drishogue answers:

For all of them in the greatness of England's mighty human soul set forth in what Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, and Milton sang; in the mighty compass of Darwin's mind, sweeping back to the beginning and stretching forward to the end; for what your Faraday did in taming the lightning to stream quietly about in the service of man; and, if these be indifferent things to you, then fight and die, if need be, in the halo of healing from the tiny light carried in the lovely, delicate hands of Florence Nightingale. Go forth to fight, perchance to die, for the great human soul of England. Go forth to fight and to destroy, not the enemies of this or that belief, but the enemies of mankind. In this fight, Edgar, righteousness and war have kissed each other: Christ, Mahomet, Confucius, and Buddha are one.



It seems evident that even in this union with the people, O'Casey is yet impelled by his personal vision and interpretation, and that essentially he is yet the artist in the tower. And because of this, the play is as personal as were the previous ones. There are, of course, war plays and propaganda plays with which the people can sympathize and which are extremely successful. To mention two, R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* and Anderson and Stallings' *What Price Glory?* There are dozens of motion pictures that one could cite which are even successful in wartime. The reason would seem to be that no premises other than the conventionally accepted and never questioned ones of the man on the street are raised. O'Casey's play is almost an ethical tract on why one should fight.

It seems exceedingly appropriate that O'Casey's play should be an Expressionist fantasy, a form as alien as any could be to the man on the street. O'Casey's theme is alien. As Sean O'Faolain says:

The new, raw, ambitious, hardfaced democracy . . . understood only realistic plays, political plays, representationalism, characterisation, explanations, social comedies and tragedies, preferably embodying what might be called the new synthetic orthodoxy, at least not diverging radically from it, not denying it, certainly not criticising or satirising it.

*Oak Leaves and Lavender*, for all of its surface-thematic conformity, for all of its aura of arrant propaganda, satirizes, criticizes, and laughs at blunders. O'Faolain's conclusion is:

So, O'Casey's early plays are now enormously popular in Ireland; but, I fear, for reasons that do little justice to his passion and his poetry. His later plays make little appeal.

A further difficulty is that O'Casey must plumb his mind in this play for reasons to accede to what the man in the street takes for granted. To buoy up his argument he calls upon the past of England and intrudes that past into the play.

The three pairs of ghostly dancers are past spirits of England, who are no longer able to succor her. The Young Son of Time functions as a god, a connection with the past and present. The Lavender Seller and her song are omens of death. The dancers permeate the play as a sort of chorus, embodying values built in the past. Even Feelim, who does not share his son's Communism, is influenced and impelled by tradition, as his speech in Act III indicates:

Milton wasn't buried in th' Abbey; he lies in th' churchyard of St. Giles, Cripplegate—where th' bombs are fallin' now . . . And Nelson—come now, the greatest sailor, maybe, that ever lived: what about him, eh? He's an inspiration to Englishmen, isn't he? . . . Come, you take pride in Nelson; and remember his courage an' glory to give you resolution an' —an' fortitude in th' day o' testin', don't you?

The play is built on the structure of character, although not nearly so tidily a structure perhaps as *The Plough and the Stars*. The outer action reports the progression toward death of men in war. There are these principal inner actions that reinforce the theme of the outer action: that of Dame Hatherleigh, that of Drishogue and Monica and Penrhyn, that of Edgar and Jennie, and that of Feelim. In addition, occasional characters are introduced to exemplify attitudes toward the war that O'Casey would criticize. Mrs. Deeda Tutting is a pro-Fascist, anti-Communist character who with another name appears in *Rose and Crown*. Mr. Constant is a coward who is attempting to escape with

his wife to America. Pobjoy is a conscientious objector.

Act I can be broken down into about ten separate scenes, that may be classified in the following manner:

1. Ironical-expository—Monica and Feelim.
2. Expository-affirmative—Joy, Jennie, and Feelim.
3. Expository-ominous-farcical—Feelim, Monica, Dillery.
4. Expository-didactic—Edgar and Drishogue.
5. Satiric-didactic-ominous—Edgar, Drishogue, Feelim, Jennie.
6. Affirmative-satiric—Dame Hatherleigh, Feelim, Mrs. Watchit.
7. Farcical—Feelim, Mrs. Watchit, Mark, and Michael.
8. Transitional-affirmative-didactic—Monica, Drishogue, Feelim.
9. Didactic—Deeda, Feelim, Joy, Michael, Mark, and others.
10. Choral—Feelim, Drishogue, and Dame Hatherleigh.

Affirmative is used in the sense of the affirmation of life and youth and physical love between the two pairs of young lovers in contrast to the negation of life by the war outside the window and the radio that lights up with the swastika. Ominous is used to refer to the scenes concerning the tale about the ghostly dancers. Didactic scenes are those in which O'Casey develops by overt argument between characters his feelings toward the war, including his rebuttals of other attitudes like those of Deeda Tutting.

It can easily be seen that the play is composed of scenes with as great a diversity in tone as the scenes in *The Plough and the Stars*. Barzun said that O'Casey "has written two first-rate plays and in the rest set adrift forty characters—more than enough good works for literary salvation." There are plenty of dramatized characters in the play, and the best scenes are those "infantile" ones in which the characters get enmeshed in red tape or engaged in

trivial but ferocious arguments, in which they have trouble with telephones, blackout curtains, and electric meters. The portion of the play that is false is the didactic part, and because the didacticism is closest to O'Casey's heart, he keeps returning to it. Drishogue's speeches particularly do much to de-dramatize the play. For instance:

You waste God's time and mine, woman. Over in the east, the people took their first fine step forward, and they look over the rim of the world now. Many can see them clearly, and many more can hear them cheering. We know full well the hardships all before us. Our spring will still have many a frosty morning and a frosty night; our summers hot hold many a burden for us; our autumn glory will still be tinged with many a starless night, the sound of sorrow loud beneath their shrouded silence; but winter's night of hopeless woe is gone forever, and the people's energetic joy shall sound like well-cast bells through every passing season!

Speeches like this are almost overt propaganda, a stepping out of the play, and because of them Drishogue, like Aya-monn and, to a smaller extent, like O'Killigain, like the Dreamer, becomes unreal. There are no faults in these characters; they are young, vital, intelligent, gentle, noble, brave, have taste and sensitivity—they have all good qualities. They are indeed much like those heroes of D. H. Lawrence who carry the didactic brunt of many of his stories and novels—Rupert Birkin of *Women in Love*, Ramon and Cipriano of *The Plumed Serpent*—they refuse individuation; they remain unbelievable. This falsity debilitates the love scenes. The dialogue is extremely stilted:

*Monica* . . . but first come, love, to my room again, to dream away from us a moment more of restless turnings to the sound of war; and give darkness another chance to hush

a lover and his lass into the sweet secrecy of themselves.

*Drishogue.* I ought to go before the house awakens.

Look! the moon is pale and worn after dancing through the sky as the beauty of the night, and is bidding goodbye at the door of dawn.

*Monica.* False dawn, with hate in all its lovely face.

The didactic scenes and the affirmative ones derive more from O'Casey's *Weltanschauung* than from his direct observation of life. The love scenes have an artificial, stagy quality about them that ruins them. The lovers say words because O'Casey feels such words are necessary to his purpose, rather than necessary to their own believability. The great beauty of *The Plough and the Stars* was that each separate scene with its separate tone was right. This play with the same structure has two types of scenes that are wrong, and these two types are enough to destroy the unity and the rightness of the dramatic structure. Again, didacticism hurts art. It is not that O'Casey could not write of men and women. His short story, "I Wanna Woman," is excellent evidence to the contrary. It is merely that in the story he is molding from reality to meaning, while in the love scenes of the play he works from meaning and hopes to attain reality.

Act II recapitulates the structure of Act I, except that there is a much more involved choral movement utilizing several Expressionist devices in the scene in which Edgar and Drishogue go off to war. The scene opens with the two men ready to leave. A purple light appears above the wireless which lights up with its swastika sign. There are two lines between Edgar and Jennie, and then the stage direction:

The trumpets sound the first line of "Deutschland über Alles" louder than ever, and a clear, threatening voice proclaims,



"Germany calling, Germany calling," immediately followed by the wail of the air-raid warning.

The crowd cries goodbye as the airmen go out.

The rush of the German warplanes is heard in the rushing swing of the music of "The Ride of the Valkyries" coming close, and then fading into the distance, as several tongues of flame shoot up into the sky seen through the windows. The crowd, led by Mark, chant encouragement to the flyers and to themselves.

After the chant is the final stage direction:

"The Ride of the Valkyries" swings into its loudest sound as Feelim, in steel hat and equipment, accompanied by the Home Guard, Monica, Jennie, Joy, and the rest stream out to do all they can to modify the destruction and uproar in the bombed town and district, leaving Dame Hatherleigh alone gazing steadily towards the window at the rising tongues of crimson and yellow flames.

This use of the Expressionist spectacle is perhaps more defensible than it was in *The Silver Tassie* and *Red Roses for Me*. In this play O'Casey does not exclude the spectacle from the dramatic action, but has it derive from that action. The play changes from heightened realism in which the tensions have been set up, into the emotional and stylized manner by which O'Casey hopes to emphasize the character's reactions. This is no substitute for dramatic action as it was in the earlier plays, but an outgrowth almost into choral commentary on that effect. With such a use of lights and stage business, it is impossible to judge the effectiveness on the printed page of what is intended for the eye and the ear. But the intensification of an emo-

tion that has already derived from character and event seems more justifiable than in the earlier plays.

Act III is the most stylized. The furniture of the room has been changed to mimic the forms of machinery and weapons of war. The stage direction reads, "the aspect of the big room has changed with the changing world outside it." The war enters the room during the act in the form of a bomb which has been found outside. The action of the act is as complicated as that of Act I. Small scenes with different characters and different tones are juxtaposed against each other. The primary movements in the act, however, are the arguments with and about the conscientious objector, Pobjoy, the finding of the bomb, the reports of the deaths of Edgar, Jennie, and Drishogue, and the final reappearance of the ghostly dancers in a scene with Dame Hatherleigh, that acts as a choral epilogue although it is not set off as the prologue is.

The play becomes more expressionistic in style in each succeeding act. Even the realistic scenes between characters become more exaggerated and it is probably only the variety of Expressionist stage effects in the last act that could make the exaggeration acceptable.

The difficulty of the play is that it wavers not between Expressionism and realism, but between explicit and implicit meaning. Against the explicit meaning of the voice from the radio, however, is contrasted Feelim's most memorable speech of the play, which in part reads:

Th' damned villains, bloodied all over with th' rent-out lives of child an' woman! They owe Feelim O'Morrigan a son; an', be Christ! old as he is, he'll help to make them pay to th' uttermost farthing in th' blood of their youngest an' their best! Let their bombs explode, an' wreck an' tear, an' tumble everything! It'll take more than they can make an' carry to punch us out of where we stand to fight them! Hearts of

steel, well tempered with hate, is what we are today—hearts of steel! Hearts of oak don't last; so hearts of steel we are! . . . Ay, from now on to fight, harry, an' rend th' Germans till they're glad to go goose-steppin' into the grave! Here on this spot, at this moment, Feelim O'Morrigan takes up th' fight where Drishogue laid it down! . . . A capbadge an' a few buttons are all that's left of my boy!

The speech seems one of the most intense and dramatically effective since the great speeches of Juno and Bessie Burgess. It does tread a line between implicit emotional speech deriving from incident and character and explicit speech, and it does hover between eloquence and banality, but I think that finally it comes to roost on eloquence and I should like to reserve a more specific discussion of it for the chapter on language.

The failure of the play is not a structural one. The theme that war is death is adequately embodied in both inner and outer actions, both of which meet in the epilogue. Nor does the failure lie in poor characterization, for certainly Feelim O'Morrigan is, discounting the caricatures of *Purple Dust*, O'Casey's finest creation since the characters of *The Silver Tassie* and *The Plough and the Stars*. Nor does the failure seem to lie in O'Casey's juxtaposition of realism, fantasy, and Expressionism. It is merely that explicit meaning cannot be mixed with the drama. It is alien and dramatically inadequate.

Yet, it would seem a gross overstatement to label the play a complete failure. In it O'Casey turns to fantasy which he will later use to great effect in *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* and *The Bishop's Bonfire*. And although the play would seem to be more drama than literature, by spurts it shows the best of O'Casey. And the best of O'Casey, even in abrupt snatches, is the best drama being written.

# 7

## SYNTHESIS

Again, if critics present were lads of judgment and sense, they would never have criticized the play, *The Bishop's Bonfire*, by comparing it with the earlier plays; for this play is of another method and manner, a different genre. They should have compared it with the play that went before which is of the same method, manner, and the same genre: the play called *Cockadoodle Dandy*. Sean O'Casey

*Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* and *The Bishop's Bonfire* may be appropriately grouped together for a number of reasons, but not because there are "of the same method, manner, and the same genre." *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* is a fantasy, written in the same manner and tone throughout; *The Bishop's Bonfire* is more unclassifiable, containing elements of fantasy, melodrama, satire, and farce. *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* is written, like *Within the Gates*, in one manner; *The Bishop's Bonfire* is written, like *The Silver Tassie*, in several manners. These two last plays, together with *Purple Dust*, are probably to O'Casey's later career what *Juno*, *The Plough*, and the *Tassie* were to his earlier—the playwright's most distinguished work.

*Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* has had few productions. Its first was at the People's Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1949, the year of its publication. The play is divided into three acts called "Scenes." The plot is not so much a causally

connected story, as it is a story which consistently halts its forward advance to digress or to introduce new characters for satiric purposes. It rambles, it is leisurely, and it makes full use of the fantasy with which O'Casey had begun to experiment in *Oak Leaves and Lavender*. In earlier plays, O'Casey's characters had had difficulties with machines—telephones, phonographs, electric light meters. In *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, O'Casey's befuddled, distracted, incompetent, lazy, and childlike characters do not have as much difficulty with normal objects and mechanical problems as they do with spirits. For instance, Michael Marthraun and Sailor Mahan have considerable trouble with a whisky bottle which has become spirit-infested and first refuses to pour and then becomes red hot. Chairs collapse under them. A top hat dances around the yard. A great wind attempts to pull their trousers off. And finally the recalcitrant cock tears Marthraun's house up, tips over statues of saints, rips up the Bible, and generally pesters and horrifies the pillars of society.

The cock, the central symbol of the play, broadly signifies vitality, the life force, fertility. The connection of the cock with fertility or new life is an old one, perhaps partially arising from the cock's proverbial crow to hasten in the new day. The play itself chiefly seems to be a conflict between a morality which is symbolized by the cock and a view of life which is promulgated by Father Domineer and acceded to by most of the men in the play. Father Domineer's view principally concerns itself with keeping women dowdy, drab, subservient, sexless. The Cock, Robin Adair, Jack the lorry driver, and the three women of the play—Lorna, Michael Marthraun's young second wife, Loreleen, his daughter by his first wife, and Marion, a maid—have, on the other hand, a lusty and vital O'Caseyan world-view.

Michael Marthraun and Sailor Mahan, around whom



the play probably mainly centers, value money more than they do women, and all of their difficulties and tormentings arise from this basic sin. Their materialism is countered and eventually defeated by life embodied in the fantastic elements of the play. An aura of the fantastic is immediately set in Act I when Michael speaks of "sinisther signs appearin' everywhere, evil evocations floatin' through the room." When Loreleen passes:

. . . an invisible wind blows th' pictures out, an' turns their frenzied faces to th' wall; once I seen the statue of St. Crankarius standing' on his head to circumvent th' lurin' quality of her presence; an' another time, I seen th' image of our own St. Pathrick makin' a skelp at her with his crozier; fallin' flat on his face, stunned when he missed! . . . I seen gay-coloured horns branchin' from her head!

The conflict is between the forces of, according to O'Casey, the dead materialistic viewpoint of the Church and State and the fantastically embodied affirmations of sex and life.

The incidents of the play are not the progressive and causally connected ones of traditional structure, nor do they compose the various actions of the second structure. Rather, the various incidents in each act are illustrative. Earlier I made a distinction between the intrinsic and extrinsic incidents of a traditional structure. A further distinction seems necessary here, for O'Casey's illustrative plot is one of his most intriguing and unconventional experiments. There is not so much a progressive plot in the play as an initial situation, developed in Scene I and then illustrated by various incidents and then finally arbitrarily ended.

A normal story had been told in the earlier plays, even though that story was often structurally distorted. A family inherits some unexpected money, their hopes are raised,

they live extravagantly, they lose the money, catastrophe. An orphaned girl begs for help, is denied, follows the life into which she is forced, and, therefore, dies. An idealistic young man ignores the appeals of his mother, his girl, and his art to help some strikers; he is shot. Perhaps only in *Purple Dust* is there a structure approaching that of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*. *Purple Dust* has the outline of a story of two Englishmen refurnishing an old hulk of a house for their mistresses and eventually losing both house and mistresses. The development of the love affairs, however, was brief and oblique, and most of the play concerned itself with the various foibles and misadventures of the English with the Irish. *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* has even less of a "plot" than *Purple Dust* and seems almost entirely anecdotal in method. For instance, any one of the particular illustrative incidents in the play almost could have another incident substituted for it. This is not to imply that such a form or lack of form is bad. Indeed, the form seems ideally suited to O'Casey's particularly discursive talents. In such a play, the grotesque, the irrelevant, and the immaterial have their own necessity, that of illustration of a central theme.

The three gambits in Scene I are the identification of Loreleen with the Cock, the eviction of the Cock from the house with the help of Shanaar, and Michael and Mahan's attraction to Marion who suddenly grows horns. Marion the maid or Maid Marion as she is once or twice called and her lover, the Messenger, called Robin Adair, seem to be a hearkening back to the Robin Hood story mixed with the old ballad, "Robin Adair."

The principal diversions in Scene II concern the breaking chairs, the bewitched bottle, the bewitched hat which turns into the Cock, the dance between Michael, Mahan, the police sergeant and Lorna, Loreleen, and Marion, and the killing of the Lorry Driver by Father Domineer.

The killing of the Lorry Driver may well be classed with the closing incident of Scene I, the journey of Julia to Lourdes. Both incidents are indicative of the illustrative nature of most of the short scenes. Both incidents further illustrate the debilitating influence of the Church; both provide further comments on the theme. The difference between these two scenes and the various incidents in a structure-of-character is that the latter incidents cannot be omitted without hurting the story's essential development. These two incidents in *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* do not add to the central conflict between the men and the women and would not be justifiable in a conventional play. They are justifiable in *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* theatrically. Without a progressive plot with a series of ascending climaxes, it becomes necessary somehow to fashion dramatic and effective endings to the various scenes. O'Casey probably wisely realized that one of the central illustrative scenes that did not differ in either tone or emphasis from a dozen other such scenes would be a disturbing and inconclusive ending. By introducing two such gratuitous scenes, the dramatist could veer away also from the predominantly farcical and satiric tone of the illustrative scenes between Michael, Mahan, and the women. As is usual in O'Casey, an act ends with an abrupt and serious scene juxtaposed against a preceding comic one.

Scene III is composed of these chief incidents: the attempted exorcism of the house, the Cock running berserk, the wind whipping the trousers off the men, the casting out of Loreleen, the return of Julia, and the final upbraiding of Michael by Robin Adair.

When the play opened off Broadway in November, 1958, O'Casey wrote in *The New York Times*:

To me what is called naturalism, or even realism, isn't enough. They usually show life at its meanest and commonest, as if

life never had time for a dance, a laugh or a song. I always thought that life had a lot of time for these things, for each was a part of life itself; and so I broke away from realism into the chant of the second act of "The Silver Tassie." But one scene in as a chant or a work of musical action and dialogue was not enough, so I set about trying to do this in an entire play, and brought forth the play that is to be given Wednesday in New York—"Cock-a-Doodle Dandy." It is my favorite play; I think it is my best play—a personal opinion; the minds of others, linked with time, must decide whether I'm wrong or right.

The New York production, which I did not see, was by all reports pretty unsatisfactory; the production at the 1959 Edinburgh Festival, which I did not see either, was, from all the reviews which I can find, excellent. Here, I think we have again an example of the theater's usual problem about these later plays, the problem of finding an imaginative director and intelligent actors. These individuals are rare because the conventional commercial play seldom requires imagination and seemingly prefers to intelligence something called "savvy."

If this play is not a great fantastic comedy, comparable in value in its genre to *Juno* and *The Plough* in theirs, then all of that immense experience that I gained from all of those dismal hours of watching Lucy and Desi to find out what was really wretched, was actually nothing; and I shall trade in my 17-inch for a 24-inch color set and all of the Tinker Toys I can buy. I do not know of any other comic structure as provocative, as full of potentialities, as free and, for centuries, as ignored by the drama as this one.

I have intimated that tragedy and tragi-comedy have each their distinct, prototypical, and most appropriate structure. Here, let me suggest that there is a third prototypical

structure, a comic structure. We have seldom seen it applied in the drama, for comic drama has appropriated the structure of tragedy. But we have seen this structure in, let me hazard, all of our great comic novels—from *The Golden Ass*, *Don Quixote*, *Tom Jones*, *The Pickwick Papers* on down to *Lucky Jim*. How completely revolutionary and yet devastatingly simple for O'Casey to recognize it and use it. If the notion catches on, we shall have to recall Mack Sennett, for Desi and Lucy are doomed.

As I write this *The Bishop's Bonfire* is still O'Casey's latest published play. It was completed in 1954 and first presented at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, on February 28, 1955. The play was directed by Tyrone Guthrie and the important role of Codger Sleehaun was played by Cyril Cusack.

At best, the play can be said to have received very mixed reviews although there were some contradictory commendations like:

O'Casey has exploded a stick of dramatic dynamite. An ugly play, beautifully written. *Daily Mail*

O'Casey's best play for the last twenty-six years. Sean's best since *The Silver Tassie*. A little mellower, with a new kind of tenderness. *Daily Telegraph*

I think it is a much better play than anything O'Casey has written since his early masterpieces. *Irish Press*

The form of the play cannot be explained by calling it a very loose second structure, containing a number of excrescent interpolations that have little to do with the theme. In form the play seems to hang between the second structure and the comic, illustrative structure of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*. The many interpolations seem to be derived from the comic structure and the many minor actions—of Keelin



and Daniel and Rankin, of Manus and Foorawn, of Father Boheroe, of the Codger and the Prodicar, and of Reiligan and the Canon—from the second structure.

Also, there are hints of several methods in the play: of fantasy in the St. Tremolo episodes, of melodrama in the final scene between Manus and Foorawn, of music-hall comedy in the Rankin-Prodicar scene in Act I, of slapstick in the Codger's crashing through the window with a bag of cement. The character of Father Boheroe, whose name means in Gaelic Red Road, seems to be the familiar character of the *raisonneur* left over from the well-made play. Indeed, *The Bishop's Bonfire* seems to utilize most of the elements O'Casey had been experimenting with and to use them more casually than they were in *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*.

The ironic tension of the structure-of-character play makes itself occasionally felt, as in the effective third act reversal of the Prodicar. This is precisely the same reversal that occurred in the character of Fluther Good between Acts I and II of *The Plough and the Stars*. It still works. O'Casey utilizes the choral effect at the end of Acts I and III. And finally, there is the dance interlude which O'Casey had learned to incorporate dramatically in this play and in *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, rather than undramatically as in *Red Roses for Me*. If Louise Mathewson is correct when she writes, "although laughter has value as a social corrective, this is not its essential feature. The true comic spirit is less concerned with correction than with joy," then the dancing scene in which Foorawn and the Codger go goose-stepping to the grave or the scene in which Daniel and Keelin dance around the room to the music of Father Boheroe's piano are certainly good cases in point.

Much of the later O'Casey evinces this joy for life. In fact, the affirmation of life becomes almost the *raison d'être*

of the later plays. O'Casey had written of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*:

Broadly, it stands against anything interfering with, or hindering, the natural joys of life, applicable to all men, but cast in a gay Irish mold. It shows, or tries to show—regarded this way—that Ireland is the world; just as Ibsen made Norway a world, and Strindberg made a world of Sweden.

The same comment seems applicable to *The Bishop's Bonfire*. For Father Domineer of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, there is Canon Reiligan; for Julia there is Foorawn; for Loreleen, Marion, and Lorna there is Keelin. The women suppressed in the earlier play by the State, the family, and the Church are similarly suppressed here. Lorna, married to old Michael, has her counterpart in Keelin, who is being forced into a similar December-May marriage.

The thematic difference between the plays is that *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* ends in a sort of grim affirmation. The women and Robin Adair are beaten by society, but not beaten down. They leave in a kind of hope and defiance, as the defeated Michael buries his head despairingly in his hands. In *The Bishop's Bonfire* the end is tragic for both good and bad characters. Everyone loses.

The structure of Act I is one of O'Casey's most complicated and is composed of about fifteen or sixteen short scenes verging into each other and treating either different aspects of the plots or presenting excrescent bits. It is difficult to compare this play with *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, as O'Casey suggests. In Act I of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* there is more of the fantastic and many fewer-faceted scenes. In *The Bishop's Bonfire* the element of the fantastic does not emerge until Act II. Suffice it to say that Act I seems not only complex, but complexly effective. Acts II

and III are different because they treat some of the various actions in longer spurts. For instance, six pages are devoted to the Porter and the St. Tremolo story, five pages to the Foorawn and Codger stories together, and twelve pages composed of four consecutive scenes to the Keelin-Daniel story in Act II. Act I allowed no more than a page or two to a particular scene before switching to a scene concerned with another of the actions.

Early in Act II, Reiligan's son, the Lieutenant, is introduced. The Lieutenant appears only in this act and has no connection to any of the actions belonging integrally to the structure-of-character. He hangs up his gun and holster in the room for Manus to take down late in Act III. Naturally, in the course of the severe house-cleaning being given particularly to this room, it is probable that the gun and holster would have been removed before Act III in preparation for the Bishop's coming. The rather obvious planting is a reminiscence of the worst of Sardou or Pinero. It would have been equally easy and more probable to allow Manus to enter in Act III already carrying a gun, but as long as O'Casey had determined to use the Lieutenant, he evidently decided he ought to give him some connection to the plot. The Lieutenant chiefly appears so that O'Casey may introduce the "Jeeps be Jeepers" dialogue he had published in *The New Statesman and Nation* and had later included in *Sunset and Evening Star*. There is no logic in the inclusion or purpose relative to the theme and story, but as O'Casey is writing a quite hybrid variation of the structure-of-character play, composed of several manners and many references, the excrescent bits seem to fit nearly as well as the essential ones. In other words, the illustrative actions of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* are able to be grafted not incongruously upon a more formal structure.

Act III devotes its first four short scenes of seven total

pages to the Keelin-Daniel story, then counterpoints against this serious action the humorous interlude of the Prodicl's forswearing liquor and giving his bottle to the Canon to put beneath the statue of St. Tremolo. The largest portion of the act returns to a portion of the play's exterior action, the preparation for the coming of the Bishop and the lighting of the Bonfire, and relates the difficulties of the Canon and Reiligan with the various actions of Rankin, Daniel, Codger, and Keelin. This scene results in Codger's being dismissed from service and also in the final, though rather inconclusive, ending of the Keelin-Daniel story. The pair are not united and Daniel knuckles under to the Church and the State, while Keelin does not. Perhaps the feeling of inconclusiveness occurs partly because there is no big scene, no "obligatory scene" between Daniel and Keelin, and the outcome is symbolized by Daniel's deciding to peel the potatoes and pluck the plover and by Keelin's refusal. O'Casey, however, having made his point is content to suggest rather than to include the obligatory scene, for he needs the characters no more.

This scene is followed by one from the Manus-Foorawn story, one from the Codger story, and then by a scene between Father Boheroe and Foorawn in which Father Boheroe's failure to help any of the characters is established. The next scene shows the Codger and the Prodicl stealing the bottle from under St. Tremolo, a scene ironically connected to the previous Prodicl scene by the reversal of characters.

This scene in which Manus shoots Foorawn is an obligatory scene, and suggests something about the nature of the second structure. In the play are two sets of lovers, Keelin and Daniel, and Manus and Foorawn. Besides these actions there are four or five others of almost equal importance. If each had an obligatory scene and a subsequent

unraveling, the last act would be as long as the first two. The second structure takes liberties, omits, suggests, symbolizes, uses fictional techniques to round out its plot.

The Manus-Foorawn scene, for instance, is highly melodramatic and shows rather strongly how much O'Casey re-invigorates stale material:

*Manus* [flinging her from him]. Oh, let me go, you mournful, empty shell of womanhood!

*Foorawn* [running to the telephone, and whipping up the receiver]. I'll get the police! I'll watch you hauled to jail; I'll have you finished in this whole district, in this whole land!

*Manus*. So that's your love and that's your charity, Foorawn's love and Foorawn's charity, you sounding cymbal, you hunk of tinkling brass! [Wildly, a deep menace in his voice, taking the gun from his pocket.] Get away from that! D'ye hear? Drop that phone, you bitch!

*Foorawn* [wildly and passionately]. I'll settle you for ever, you spoiled priest! [He fires at her. She drops the telephone, seems stunned for a second. Then she goes to the table where the ledger and the papers are and, pressing a hand to her side, sinks down on the chair that stands there. As she staggers to the chair] You ruffian!

Then, before she dies she writes a note saying that she committed suicide. The scene seems to me one of the best that O'Casey has written since the death of Bessie Burgess. It is not written in the realistic manner of that earlier scene, but utilizing the elements of melodrama much more freely. It should be extremely effective, but difficult to play, because it is made up of such hyper-Boucicault corn.

The last scene is a sort of chorus as the Codger and the Prodigal partly drunk pass the window and sing "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" while Manus remains hid-



den in the room, to depart finally when the stage is silent and the flames of the bonfire grow in the distance. O'Casey calls the play, "A sad play within the tune of a Polka." The singing of "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" had also ended Act I. Shortly after finishing the play, O'Casey wrote, "Tho' by no means satisfied, I think it is good."

In the winter of 1958, the old sow that eats her farrow, as James Joyce called Ireland, went on a rampage again and bared her old, yellow teeth for two of her most illustrious sons, Joyce and Sean O'Casey. The occasion was the second Dublin International Theatre Festival which was to open on May 11. On February 15, the following statement by the Dublin Tostal Council was printed in *The Irish Times*:

A meeting of the Dublin Tostal Council considered the public controversy which has developed in connection with the proposed production of "Bloomsday," a play by Allan McClelland transposed from James Joyce's "Ulysses," and taking into consideration the effect of such a controversy on the national Tostal effort decided, in consultation with representatives of Bord Failte, to request the festival director (Mr. Brendan Smith) to find an alternative.

The council wishes to stress that, in its opinion, the play in question did not contain anything of an offensive nature.

The original announcement included the world premiere of a play, "The Drums of Father Ned," by Sean O'Casey. Negotiations with Mr. O'Casey regarding certain technical alterations were unsuccessful. It was indicated to Mr. O'Casey that his play would be acceptable only if such changes and alterations were made. He declined to give his permission, and in the circumstances withdrew his play.

It must be emphasised that the alterations requested were concerned with production details of a technical and struc-

tural character only, and at no time was the play ever considered by either the council or the producing company to contain anything unsuitable for presentation.

The one play was dropped and the other withdrawn after the Most Rev. Dr. McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin, expressed public doubt about the advisability of producing the plays. Although news releases to the United States stressed that there was no connection between the Archbishop's opinion and the play's withdrawal, Mr. O'Casey told *The Irish Times* that, "It is quite evident that the Archbishop's objections have been accepted and acted upon by the Tostal Council. His objections were against the authors, not the plays." Mr. McClelland expressed a similar sentiment.

The forced withdrawal of *The Drums of Father Ned* from the Theatre Festival has its inane and ludicrous aspects beneath its essential grimness. The Tostal Council has parodied the refusal of *The Silver Tassie*, by using the same specious reasoning put forth by the Directors of the Abbey Theatre in 1928. The event seems particularly ridiculous, considering that O'Casey's prestige has tremendously increased in the last thirty years and that the members of the Council can scarcely have the weight of Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Robinson and that the weight of Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Robinson hardly dented O'Casey's tassie.

How the Tostal Council momentarily muffled Father Ned's drum can best be explained by O'Casey's own words in an unsent letter to the editor of *The Irish Times*:

I should like to say a few words about the Dublin rejection of the above-named play, in fairness to myself.

I did not ask the Tostal to take an interest in the play, much more to do it. While writing it, and when it had been

finished, I had no thought of the Tostal Council wanting to get the play for production in Dublin. The Council, through their hard-working Chairman, asked, not once, but several times to see and read the typescript. I was very reluctant to comply, instancing my desire that the opportunity of publicity the Tostal gave should be used for the benefit of some younger or newer playwright; but was met with the reply that none of the younger playwrights had come forward with anything suitable; and, now, that the Tostal Drama Festival has been postponed (which is an elegant word for abandonment), it would seem that this opinion was the right one. The Script was sent to Dublin at the beginning of September, 1957, so that those concerned had plenty of time to consider the play, yet it was only after the Archbishop had issued his fiat that the discovery of structural changes was made. Further, it was pointed out in the letter saying the Script had been sent, in reply to suggestions of possible producers of the play, that "(my) play has something in it besides its 'realism,' and it is this odd breeze within a wind that worries me in direction." I was afraid that the selected producer might not be capable of embracing my intentions. However, no complaints came over the months, and I settled down to other work. It wasn't till the 24/1/58, that I received a letter signed by the Directors of a Theatre to whom I had not given the play demanding that I should give the producer "the necessary authority to make such alterations as he requires"; and that "its structural state made the play unproduceable . . ." This was followed by a letter from the Tostal Council saying the same thing within a few words. I at once surmised that this was not an attempt to improve O'Casey (in my opinion, none of those who objected were at all competent to do it), but an untidy way of getting rid of him, for, undoubtedly, the outcry from Drumcondra was dinging their ears. When news came of the dropping of the Joycean play, this surmise became a certainty. As I had no

desire to battle a group into keeping a play they wished to get rid of, I withdrew it.

When the script returned, I found—though it was quite obvious that it had been read by far more than one person—there wasn't a single mark on it (other than alterations I had already made myself) to indicate any tentative idea of questionable construction. To this day, I haven't the slightest notion of what part of the play, in their opinion, needed an alteration. It is rather comic to think of a frightened Archbishop frightening the Tostal Council into closing the gate of Dublin on Dubliners. Shut the gates! Quick; we have not a moment to spare. The Archbishop doesn't know (or doesn't care) that a work by Joyce or Beckett, or even by O'Casey, performed in Dublin, is of more importance to Dublin than it is to any of those authors: that outside Dublin is a wide, wide, wide world, and that this wide place is Joyce's oyster, Beckett's oyster, and even O'Casey's oyster; or that these voices, hushed in Dublin, will be heard in many another place.

Regarding Quid Nunc's remark that I withdrew the play because of a demand for 'tightening it up,' let me say that this is a far call from 'structural alterations.' Tightening up is often done after production, it may mean only a change of tempo; and what is called 'formlessness' may be a form in itself, as for instance, in J. Bull's *Other Island*, Chekov's plays, and Shaw's *Heartbreak House*. Life is like that at times. Few places can be so formless as Ireland's at the present time. It is like a kaleidoscope, but giving—as kaleidoscope—no settled or discernible pattern, however one may twist it slow or with speed. This the play tried to show, with the confusion animated by the activity of the Tostal in which there was hope and resolution . . . a few quiet words from an Archbishop are heard, and the whole Tostal Drama Festival dissolves away from the Irish stage . . .

So, by demand of Dublin's Catholic Archbishop, this cit-

izen, with a tear in his eye, a pain in his heart . . . has to say a second time—Inishfallen Fare Thee Well.

In a letter to David Krause, O'Casey makes some further observations upon his withdrawal of the play and some observations on his intentions within the play:

Now they are busy circulating the news that the *D. of Father Ned* was abandoned because it was a bad play, mediocre stuff. He tells us of 'important personages and important and competent people of the theatre' who 'had read the script' as 'informing him' that the play was about as bad as it could be, admitting that he hasn't read it himself. I have challenged to let us know the names of these important personages, and I have asked how important they are, and why do they go about whispering without having the courage to tell the world who they are. But I imagine I am but wasting my time. They carefully steer clear of mentioning the Archbishop's declaration against the production of an O'Casey play during the Tostal. He hasn't read the play either, but I'm sure he read *The Bishop's Bonfire*, and that it was this play that soured his archiepiscopal soul. I enclose some of the clippings that may give you a bird's eye view of what happened; but the Tostal Council have ignored my suggestion that all letters between them and me should be printed, if they wish to give those interested a clearer view of what happened. The Green Crow's view has yet to come, but I'm taking my time so as to let the Irish 'writers' tease their minds over the whole question; for a more cowardly lot of leaders of opinion I verily believe lives in no other land outside Ireland. The Director sent down here to me (the man for your play, said the Council chairman) was a lad who wasn't thirty years of age, and I expected to welcome the courage and enthusiasm of youth. God, he was terrified at the realism and the fantasy in the same play, and kept muttering that he thought it



wouldn't do; but I labored at trying to put spunk into him, and he went away, I thought, convinced that it would be a feather in his cap to do the play. They had had the play for months, and I had concluded it had been studied and sorted out in at least a tentative way; but when I got the scripts back, there wasn't a single mark positive or negative on either of them. Then a week after he had gone, I got a letter from the Globe Theatre (to whom I hadn't given the play), signed by two Directors (actors) saying they considered the play unproduceable, and they wouldn't commit themselves to doing it till I sent them the written authority giving power to the Director full permission to alter it according to his requirements. Some time, I'll type out the short letter I sent them in reply.

Oddly enough, the priestly spirit of the play, (Father Ned who never appears) is built from the thoughts of an old priest who was exiled to Altoona, Penn., and Canon Hayes, who labored to make rural Ireland brighter, and full of self-reliance in creating a new and active life, with hand, mind, and imagination. This clashed with business, parochialism, and out-dated clericalism (a humourous figure and kindly withal), all against the background of the work for the Tostal. This microcosm is meant (successfully or not, I don't know) to portray the whole condition of Ireland as she is; for today, a colorless kaleidoscope, a kaleidoscope, twist it how you may, never shows a colorful or settled pattern; that is the technique which no one seemingly could accept; though I am convinced they wanted to rid themselves of the play when the Abishop [sic] spoke; and after events proved it. Now, they are trying to fix the fact of a mediocre play as the reason, dumb about the Abishop's camouflaged curse on O'Casey. And all are concerned only about O'Casey's 'prestige'! So for the second day, I have had to say Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well.

In a letter of March 3, to the present writer, Mr. O'Casey made a further comment on his intentions in the play:

. . . and the form was an effort to do something like what R. Strauss did in his music to Don Chichote, picture following picture in sounds of lovely music. The play tries to show some dramatic pictures of present-day Ireland; of course, the drama form is no way comparable to Strauss' lovely creation, tho' when I was writing it, I didn't think of Strauss, hadn't even heard it; but some time ago, I listened to Strauss, and said to myself—"That's something like what I aimed at doing in *The Drums of F. Ned*."

Mr. O'Casey's comments about the form of the play are, of course, subjective ones, but perhaps enough has been said analytically about the plays already in the preceding chapters. The form of the play is the form of *The Bishop's Bonfire*, and Mr. O'Casey's comment on the form is perhaps the best metaphoric statement that could be made.

The play is the story of the preparations for a Tostal in the Irish town of Doonavale. The conflict again is one of O'Casey's most engaging variations on the theme of life and youth and song against the forces of death and age and tears. Like the other recent plays, *Father Ned* is a beautiful example—a much better example than *Red Roses for Me* or *Oak Leaves and Lavender*—of how the playwright is able to combine in an integral and organic manner disparate elements like whimsey, fantasy, farce, satire, burlesque, symbolism, melodrama, expressionism, the song and the dance into a whole of intricate and compelling complexity.

The play is in three acts and a "Prerumple." The "Prerumple" which takes place in the time of the troubles "thirty-four years or so ago" is in itself a devastating

parable and indictment of the Irish character that may well stand alone as one of the sparest, most telling and grimly grotesque single pieces that O'Casey has ever written. McGilligan and Binnington are two young merchants who will grow older to become the counterparts of Michael Marthraun and Sailor Mahan. They were born on the same street, went to the same school, are courting sisters, and profess such a ferocious hatred for each other that they are utterly oblivious to the threat of death. Even though commanded to shake hands or die by the Officer of the Black and Tans, McGilligan and Binnington refuse, and the comments of the Tan soldiers as they fire at the two men are themselves a fierce irony:

*1st Tan:* Shockin' show-down of hatred, sir. (He fires to the left)

*2nd Tan:* Flyin' in God's face it is. (He fires to the right)

*3rd Tan:* Wonder if they ever went to Sunday School when they was kids? (He fires to the left)

Eventually the Officer refuses to shoot the two Irishmen because, as he says, "these two rats will do more harm to Ireland living than they'll ever do to Ireland dead." The subsequent acts of the play, when McGilligan and Binnington have become Councilor and Alderman of Doonavale, yet having nothing to do with each other except in business, indeed bear out the Officer's prophecy. The utter ferocity of the two men is beautifully exemplified in their last speeches, speeches which are as dynamic in context as is the oldest son's comment on the mother, "Here comes the hophead," in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. "You muddy ditch-worm!" cries McGilligan. "You dung-beetle!" cries Binnington. And both of them crawl off-stage, away from an askew Keltic cross while the flames rise ever higher in the background and a chant is heard in the distance:

The Auxies and th' Tans are turning  
 Ireland's living into the dead;  
 Her homes in fiery ruins are falling,  
 Like Lenten ashes upon her head.

The little parable of the "Prerumble" is as lean, spare, vital, biting, and pertinent as anything in all of O'Casey's work.

The form of the remainder of the play will be a familiar one to the reader familiar with O'Casey's last works. As in *The Bishop's Bonfire*, when there was the preparation for the arrival of the Bishop to act as the external action of the play, so in *Father Ned* is there the external action of the preparations for the Tostal. There are various internal actions, some of them given rather completely, most of them merely by their high spots. These internal actions again are composed of many different dramatic manners. For instance, Act I contains scenes of heightened realism, farce, satire, song, a portion of a playlet, and a comic vaudeville ending shot through with overtones of grimness.

The play has many more facets than grimness, however. For instance, there is the delightful scene in Act II between the Ulsterman, Alec Skerighan, who has made overtures to the Irish maid, Bernadette Shillayley, who immediately collapses and cries, "What'll you do if I die here gaspin'?"

*Skerighan:* Ye'll no die, I'm tullin' you. Stay stull, on you'll be leppin' 'bout, gay as ever. Domn it, you weren't in me arrms f'r more'n a monnit, girrl, on I thinkin' you were one who wouldn't wondher away from a wee kiss!

*Bernadette:* (With a squealing moan) A wee kiss! Only a monnit! An' me arm bruished, me legs twisted, me shoul-dher dislocated—you've tangled one part of me body with another!

*Skerighan*: Domn it, girrl, it was yoursel' led me intil it! Everything was innocent on' firm, tull ye pranc'd round swingin' your skirt, twirlin' your legs, on' sailin' ahead twutterin' your luddle bum!

*Bernadette*: (Prostrate on the sofa—horrified) Twittherin' me luddle bum! Oh, blessed saints above, d'ye hear that! Oh, the villainous action! Twittherin' me little bum! Me that never heard th' word utthered before, an' guess only dimly at its meanin'! An' Father Fillifogue dhrivin' th' poor, innocent Tom away, to thrust me into th' throe of a desthroyer.

Then, after Skerighan pacifies her by some money, she limps out of the room and is last seen "gone down th' sthreet, gallopin' like a goat." This brilliantly conceived and executed scene with its fantastically expressive language is but one of many indications in the play that O'Casey has lost none of his comic power.

Further, his portrayals of Alec Skerighan, Bernadette Shillayley, and Mr. Murray, the parish organist, are quite the caliber of Boyle, Fluther, and Michael Marthraun; and his dialogue, as the excerpt above may well indicate, almost consistently demands comparison with the best dialogue of the autobiographies, the earlier plays, with the best dialogue of the modern comic drama. And when you have compared it with Shaw, Wilde and Synge and possibly Behan and possibly that small amount that is the best of Fry, then you have to look back to the Restoration, to Congreve and Wycherley, to find anything that approaches it.

O'Casey's wisdom and canny stagecraft in this play may be suggested by his wise restraint in never bringing Father Ned, his symbol of the good life, onto the stage. We only see Father Ned through the words and reports of the



other characters, and through these eyes he becomes a figure of magic, assuming legendary proportions, containing overtones of myth. It is not merely that, for Father Ned, O'Casey took a leaf from Chekhov's notebook about the potency of the invisible character; for the figure of Father Ned is more suggestive than could be expected from any mere mechanical device.

I earlier suggested that O'Casey used a prototypical comic structure for this play and for *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*. Let me add now that he has also used the traditional comic content that only thinly hides by its modern dress its intimate relation to myth and ritual. Gilbert Murray and others have suggested that the drama is an offspring of primitive religion around the Mediterranean world, closely connected with the flux of seasons, with germination and harvest; that tragedy is an emblem of the dying god, of the dying year, and comedy a Comus, a marriage of the god, suggesting germination and rebirth.

That *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* and *The Drums of Father Ned* offer close parallels to the myth is obvious both by their plot and their manner. Father Ned is the God and the Tostal is the festival, the herald of a new and fruitful life and vitality that will replace the old worn-out life. This theme is pointed by the closing curtain when the upholders of the old life—Father Fillifogue, Binnington, and McGilligan—lie sprawled upon the table, immobile, crushed, defeated and Mr. Murray points triumphantly out the window to the triumphant sound of the drums of Father Ned. Further, both plays are enveloped by an aura of the fantastic, by magic, by mystical roosters and maverick priests, against which the Father Fillifogues and Domineers, the representatives of civilized religion, are powerless. Consider, for instance, the impression that Father Ned makes upon Skerighan:

*Skerighan* (Suddenly jumping to his feet out of his chair, agitated and excited): Whisht! Thot was hom, ut musta been! (He runs to the sideboard, pours out a stiff whiskey, and lowers it at a gulp) It was hom I seen! . . . Standin' in a lorry, naked tae th' world.

*Father F.* (Half rising from his chair—mystified): Father Ned—naked!

*Skerighan*: Not thot way, mon, for there couldna be claithin' on a body thot wasna there, but fierce, green eyes shinin' lak omeralds on fire in a white face thot was careerin' about, though stayin' stull as th' evenin' stur, starin' up tae me fra' doon in th' valley below. . . . Ay, on a wild flop of ruddy hair, flamin' lak a burnin' bush; one long white hond pointin' up, th' ither one pointin' doon, forbye th' sound of a clear voice sayin' naethin', yut meanin' all things; on all surrounded be a mighty clerical collar round a neck I couldna see; all th' time th' green eyes starin' doon at me frae th' top o' th' hull, on up at me frae th' valley below thot werena there . . . but I canna ken richt if I seen thom, or didna see, for ut was sudden-like, on I seen or didna see yin on a' through a green mist, thon a golden light, yin on a' buzzin off in a purple glow!

I first saw the manuscript of *Father Ned* shortly after its withdrawal from Dublin and, although on paper I did not realize how eminently theatrical it was, I was convinced that it was one of the most accomplished of his later plays. There was no point in suggesting a performance at the theater of the college at which I was then teaching, for, in a fashion typical of this country's desultory college theater, an experimental drama was something like *Ghosts* (1881), *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1922), or, to be daringly modern, *Winterset*. Later, remembering O'Casey's fondness for amateur theatricals in his youth, I wrote to ask if there were any immediate commitments

for the play and if he would object to an amateur performance in Lafayette, Indiana, where I was then teaching. When he and his agent, Miss Jane Rubin, agreed, I suggested to the Lafayette Little Theatre Board that the play be done as the last production of the season. Ultimately this occurred, and the play was given its first performance on April 25, 1959—but not before everybody remotely concerned had harped and moaned about the play's difficulty.

In fact, even O'Casey went so far as to write, "It is a difficult play to do—as most of mine are—but it can be done, provided the actors don't bother about the Irish accent or 'brogue'." I think that O'Casey is both right and wrong. It is almost disastrous for an American cast to attempt a realistic brogue, and nothing is as artificial and ruinous as a brogue done badly. But it is both possible and appropriate for American actors to attempt, as the Actors' Studio did excellently in their *Shadow of a Gunman*, the shadow of a brogue.

As for the play's difficulty, any good play done well is difficult, and it is much more difficult to do a bad play well than a good one. Who has not seen in a college or civic theater a couple of dozen fugitives from the Broadway stage that are much more intensely difficult than *Father Ned* because they are so packed full of awkwardness, conventionality, timidity, insipidity, and dullness? It would take a Kazan to make these innocuous trinkets anything other than awkward, conventional, timid, insipid, and dull.

But O'Casey has filled his play so utterly full of sure-fire material that a rewarding performance can be given by only tolerable or even—I would almost venture to say—inept actors. And not only does the play have God's plenty of the most outlandish comic incident being written, but also the burden of the play does not rest upon one or two leads. What is more eminently practical for an

amateur group than a play whose burden is almost equally divided between about ten people who need only be adequate rather than between two people who have got to be good?

What I saw in directing the play was to me as much a shock as seeing how excellent *Shadow of a Gunman* could be upon the stage. For example, when I read the play it seemed to me that the final act was weak, talky, and tended to slide into a sort of thin semi-Expressionism. I was completely deceived, and when I saw the act begin to take form, I also saw how craftily O'Casey had devised it. What had seemed merely a tedious argument about religion suddenly appeared as a delightful revelation of inanity. What had seemed on paper a weak curtain became when dressed up with its lights, music, drumbeats, and pantomime potentially, if not actually, one of the most potently effective curtains I know of.

My co-director, Mrs. Jeanne Orr, and I decided that the most important thing to remember about an O'Casey production was that a lively and buoyant spirit should permeate the play, for the themes of the last plays are ultimately the joy of life. These last plays should never be treated reverently as if they were "Literature" with a capital "L" or as if their author were embalmed as one of the Glories of the Past or canonized as a Grand Old Man. Like Molière's plays, these were mainly meant to be immediately entertaining to a lot of people. There were elements in the play that we knew we could not do justice to. The lyric elements demanded more experienced actors than we had. But, as the play is primarily a comedy, we felt that if we played the comedy for all that we could get out of it, the comic spirit would buoy up our other failings.

Although most of our audience chortled through two hours and a half, it would be wrong to assert that we had convinced everybody by the final curtain that he had

just seen a great play or that there were not people who left shrugging, "Yes, it was funny, but what was it about?"

At first these reactions seemed pretty distressing, for we were bent on convincing everyone that it was a great play. In retrospect, though, I think that the play achieved its chief function—it made people laugh. It may take longer to educate an audience to recognize what it is laughing about. Bernard Shaw recognized that fact and was never discouraged by it.

An audience goes to a comedy, expecting a well-made traditional plot with no loose ends and no excrescent material. O'Casey's comic plots, to people who have not seen *Bartholomew Faire* or read *Tom Jones*, are a bit baffling. True, they start with a situation and a conflict and they end with a conclusion. In between they do not progress by the Aristotelian tragic formula of causal incident arising from causal incident, but by a meaningful juxtaposition of moods.

Charles Morgan first used the term "Kaleidoscope" to suggest O'Casey's method. The term is eminently apt, but the whirling beauty of a kaleidoscope is puzzling to an audience long conditioned to a succession of stills from a slide projector.

Yet conversely, audiences—New York ones as well as those in academic communities—which are shocked by any deviations from the well-made plot demand from plays a verbal and thematic subtlety which only the greatest plays have and which can probably only be relished in the study. This is a strange phenomenon and one of the chief reasons why O'Casey is at war with the contemporary theater.

Critics have for years talked of the gap between the modern painter or poet and his audience. But while the painter and poet have become more sophisticated than the audience, the modern theater audience has become



more sophisticated than the playwright. I attribute the cause to the climate of criticism which has brushed off on the college graduate. Modern criticism has done little with the drama, for it is patently ludicrous to stalk through, say, Molière hunting archetypes and myths and symbol clusters (and although I, above, am not innocent, I have not by my allusion to myth proven *Father Ned's* worth; I have only probed his genealogy); but such criticism has created a most subtle approach to the novel, the poem, and the picture. In this day, when the theater is no more a popular art and depends chiefly upon the college graduate for its audience, the crowning mainstay of the form, its magnificent naïveté, its theatricality, is forgotten.

Too many of our dramatists—Eliot, Miller—are caught between two fires of naïveté and complexity with the result that they are neither dramatic nor meaningful. Consequently, the drama languishes.

O'Casey is eminently, ultimately, foremost and sideways a man of the theater, and I think that his flamboyantly theatrical last plays prove that point. *The Drums of Father Ned* insists that, although the Green Crow is aging, his caw is neither hoarse nor thin, but clear and piercing. With plays like *Purple Dust*, *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, and *The Drums of Father Ned* in his nest, the Green Crow can no longer be ignored by us or rebuffed by his countrymen. Ignoring O'Casey now is only a measure of our own poverty, for it is too increasingly apparent that O'Casey, like W. B. Yeats and good Irish whisky, improves with age.

## 8

THE STATE O' CHASSIS:  
A STUDY IN STYLE

"The worl's in a state o' chassis," cried Captain Boyle, and ever since then Boyle's words have been applied to his creator. Again—in the only sense which really concerns the critic, O'Casey is not at all in a state of chassis. His art is a directed evolution impelled by a definite critical theory.

One method of gauging artistry—perhaps even more precarious than the attempt by discussing structure—is by analyzing an author's style. Undeterred, I shall attempt in the following pages to illustrate not only certain elements of O'Casey's style, but also a growth and eventually a conscious grasp of rhetorical principles, a grasp tenacious enough to produce in the author's autobiographies and later dramas some of today's most flexible, evocative, and eloquent prose.

As a product of the Dublin slums and as a Protestant in a rigorously Catholic country, O'Casey attained education largely by his own efforts. His prose style has emerged by a process of intense personal discovery. Fortunately his language has been tempered by Shakespeare and the Elizabethan playwrights, and by Milton and the King James Bible. Unfortunately it has been tempered by

Shelley and Joyce. His style developed from a slavish emulation of a few sources, through a heightened reproduction in his plays of Dublin speech, speech sieved flamboyantly through his own personality, and to the remarkable prose of the autobiographies, which offers no lessened intensity by being more rigidly controlled.

O'Casey's great stylistic growth may be well illustrated by his early verse, some of which was published in the volume *Windfalls* and which is extremely imitative and extremely bad. Although the poet calls this early work "shabby verse," the term is not particularly apt. The youthful O'Casey's grasp of his meter and rhyme is adequately, even well controlled. There is no formal shabbiness, but rather a surprising tidiness for an amateur, self-taught poet. The badness lies elsewhere.

A better characterization would be "poesy." The choice of themes is conventional—love, beauty, nature—and the method palely reflects Wordsworth, Shelley, and Tennyson. Poetic diction, inversions, personifications, pathetic fallacies, poeticized spelling, and repetitious and hackneyed imagery combine to destroy the effect of an occasional well-turned couplet, vivid image, or even a suggestion of a packed, tough, Hopkins-like line.

The poem, "A Walk with Eros," with its sixty-nine stanzas of six lines each, the first, third, and fifth of four beats, the second, fourth, and sixth of three beats, and rhyming on the second, fourth, and sixth lines, is the most ambitious early poem and reflects well the poet's early diction. The poem scarcely ever rises above the female poesy of the first stanza:

Oh, love is ever, ever old,  
As love is ever young,  
Extending from man's heart to all  
The stars in heaven flung

A song that's ever singing, yet  
A song that's never sung.

Further, fuzzy personifications pervade the poem. In the second stanza, "Eros strolls." In the third stanza, the seasons have voices: Spring a youthful song, Summer a full chorus, Autumn a pensive whisper, and Winter a silence drear. These noises are heard by "love's enchanted ear." Also, Spring can pour out her winds of life, Nature has limbs that she frees from Winter's garments, Life has a step, Trees are coy maidens in distress, draping their limbs before the swain Spring with his "ardent glance." The meadow has a breast, the violet a gentle hand, and time "steady hands." The night has a tent and Certainty can speak "loud and fast," but Doubt is "stricken dumb." The sky has a "long gloomy face," the corn has "waving hair," and the city has a surly frown.

The poem bulges with poetic clichés—our surging sense, our slumbering souls, glowing raptures, Nature's lore, life's decaying rose, mystic darkness and wanton glee. There is much poetic language—ope for open, 'neath for beneath, 'tis for it is, 'mid for amid, and, worst of all, 'tween for between. The poet occasionally drops syllables to push words into his meter:

From thick clust'ring hosts of blooms . . .  
And gave on th'illumin'd scroll . . .  
Lumb'ring hours 'tween dawn and dark . . .

Equally irritating is the dropping of a letter and the insertion of an unneeded apostrophe:

Pour'd in streams of ardent breathing . . .  
Whenever flash'd across our eyes . . .  
Drab-fac'd and gable-spir'd . . .

There are poeticized spellings, such as thro' for through and tho for though, and the normal syntactical order is frequently inverted:

Here Statesman, with sly hands and slick . . .  
 And grin with age-worn faces grim . . .  
 . . . death life's stem/to mystic darkness throws . . .

Little would be gained by such a lengthy and gratuitous knocking over of straw men, indeed straw men repudiated by the author (O'Casey wrote caustically in *Sunset and Evening Star* that, "Orwell [is] as near to the genius of Joyce as Sean's few verses are near to the poetical genius of Shakespeare or Shelley."), if O'Casey's later styles were not so tremendously different that they seem to have been composed by another writer.

Even a writer as lucid as Swift had his lapses. Consider, for instance, this passage quoted by Herbert Read in *English Prose Style*:

Last year a paper was brought here from England, called a Dialogue between the Archbishop of Canterbury and Mr. Higgins, which we ordered to be burnt by the common hangman, as it well deserved, though we have no more to do with his Grace of Canterbury, than you have with this Archbishop of Dublin, whom you suffer to be abused openly, and by name, by that paltry rascal of an observator; and lately upon an affair, wherein he had no concern; I mean, the business of the missionary of Drogheda, wherein our excellent primate was engaged, and did nothing but according to law and discretion.

I quote this passage from one of the language's great stylists to indicate that nobody but an affected sciolist like



John Lyly, a pompous windbag like Lord Macauley, or a cunning hack like Mickey Spillane, could maintain a determined and unvarying level of style. A man as sensitive to language as Swift has lapses, and it would be the most ar-rant pedantry to insist that he did not.

I include these comments, which are prefatory to an analysis, a defense and a eulogy of O'Casey's prose style, because it seems fair and necessary to make an introductory admission that O'Casey's style, like Swift's or D. H. Lawrence's or Robert Graves's or Edmund Wilson's or any other excellent stylist's, has its murky, even ludicrous moments. Let us first, then, investigate the worst. In an earlier chapter, I raised some objections to Act III of *Red Roses for Me*. Aside from any objections which can be raised against the act as drama is an objection against its language. If the poem—and the act has been called a dramatic poem—does not exist dramatically, it must exist lyrically. As a long lyric poem, its diction is validly open to more serious scrutiny.

First, it seems suggestive to note that with nothing dramatic in the act, no furtherance of plot, the diction becomes undramatic and vague. What, for instance, does Finnoola's sentence, "She's glowin' like a song sung be Osheen himself, with th' golden melody of his own harp helpin'!" mean? Or what is Ayamonn's, "Th' sky has thrown a gleaming green mantle over her bare shoulders, bordhered with crimson, an' with a hood of gentle magenta over her handsome head," but a poor personification? Or, to consider a section which is arranged poetically rather than as prose:

Fair city, I tell thee that children's white laughter,  
 An' all th' red joy of grave youth goin' gay,  
 Shall make of thy streets a wild harp ever sounding  
 Touch'd by th' swift fingers of young ones at play!

If good writing, as Allen Tate says, is able to bear the closest literal scrutiny, does the simile of the street being made into a harp touched by children's feet work on the representational level? It would be the feet of the children which touch the street rather than their fingers. O'Casey is caught in the dilemma of having the children walk on their hands or play the harp with their feet.

The author's words seem almost an attempt to substitute verbal dramatics in lieu of genuine, integral structural ones. Spoken on the stage, such lines are less likely to be noticed or to be accepted even as true eloquence. On the printed page, they often seem rather glaring faults. As Moody E. Prior commented in *The Language of Tragedy*:

The failure of poetic prose to appeal to more recent writers of poetic drama arises from the fact that the style does not lend itself to the most original and vivid features of the modern poetic expression and that it is not appropriate to the expression of the moods of the present day. The later plays of Sean O'Casey illustrate these difficulties . . . O'Casey introduces . . . prose more elaborate and mannered than that which serves for most of the dialogue in the play, and the effect is almost invariably one of sentimental effusiveness. . . .

Little of O'Casey's work, and none of his mature work, is imitative. When George Orwell reviewed *Drums Under the Window* for the *Observer*, he remarked about the style, "the book is written in a sort of basic Joyce, sometimes effective in a humorous aside, but . . . hopeless for narrative purposes." "Basic Joyce!" snorted O'Casey in *Sunset and Evening Star*. "Bad or good; right or wrong, O'Casey's always himself." Even in the period of "A Walk with Eros," O'Casey was capable of a second style in a satiric strain, which would develop, in the autobiographies and

occasional pieces, into something quite inimitably his own. For instance, "Grand Oul Britannia," another early poem, contains qualities with which O'Casey will refine the romanticism of "A Walk with Eros" into something much more palatable. "Grand Oul Britannia" is topical, satiric, in dialect, and rather in the same genre as DeFoe's "True Born Englishman":

You want a pound or two from me,  
 Ses the Grand Oul Dame Britannia,  
 For your oul' Hibernian Academy?  
 Ses the Grand Oul Dame Britannia.  
 But you know we've got the Huns to quell,  
 And we want the cash for shot and shell,  
 So your artists all can go to hell!  
 Ses the Grand Oul' Dame Britannia.

The pretentious and imitative style of "A Walk with Eros" is gone, and in its place is a satiric manner, colloquially rooted in Dublin speech. Although O'Casey may occasionally return to a lush diction in, for instance, many speeches of Donal Davoren in *The Shadow of a Gunman*, of the Poet in *Within the Gates*, and of Ayamonn Breydon in *Red Roses for Me*, he will return with a difference. The effusions of Davoren, which are rather typical, occur in a dramatic context, and the context provides an ironic comment upon the speech to prove that Davoren is ineffectual, a "poet and poltroon." The romantic attitude impelling the first style now seems, for the most part, disciplined by the ironic detachment of the second style.

"Grand Oul Britannia" is essentially dramatic speech. The fact that it is in a poetic form substantiates the fact that O'Casey's dramatic speech in the plays is a formal and a fanciful rather than a literal transcription. For instance, recent comments about Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fel-*

*low* frequently mentioned that the language was the most playful and vivid seen in the theater since O'Casey (I'm not exactly sure what "since O'Casey" means). There is, however, a great difference. Behan's piquant dialogue depends upon the terminology of the prison. Take away the prison locutions and Behan's language is unremarkable. O'Casey's language gets its power from more than the idiom of the Dublin slums. It depends upon its witty distortions of syntax, its rhythm, repetition, dialect, malapropisms, alliteration, and a completely unrestricted vocabulary, one free to create havoc in any corner of the language, rather than restricted by the argot of a small group. O'Casey's language becomes a transformation rather than a transcription. At its most delirious, O'Casey's language becomes inimitably fantastic and has what Wallace Stevens called "the essential gaudiness of poetry." For example, in *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, ". . . followin' that Loreleen when she's about, hurtin' th' tendher muscles of your eye squintin' down at her legs." In *Purple Dust*, the time it will take to get the telephone connected depends "On how long it'll take to get th' sthrame o' sound from here flowin' safely to whatever end there may be fixed for it to be heard in." In *Red Roses for Me*, men are only "Time's promoted reptiles."

Such language consistently used creates a land as individual as Oz, a land where Captain Boyle is forever "fixed to the wheel with a marlin spike, an' the wins blowin' fierce an' the waves lashin' an' lashin'." There are few better languages to describe a real world in a state of chassis than a language which ripples in uncomprehending distortion above the surface of reality.

A grand example of O'Casey's awareness of illusion and reality and of their two languages occurs in Boyle's marlin spike speech, when the wild romanticism of his reminiscences about his imagined past is prosaically and ironically



broken by the voice of the Coal Vender raucously shouting, "Any blocks, coal-blocks." Such examples, as perhaps the preceding chapters have made evident, can be multiplied almost indefinitely.

Another indication of O'Casey's awareness and conscious control of language is his frequent use of parody. For instance, the successful satiric farce, *Purple Dust*, has frequently been criticized, with other of O'Casey's plays, for stilted diction, and because this criticism is more provocative than the even more considerable and vague adulation of his rich, vivid, and brilliant "Poethry," and also because *Purple Dust* contains several—to use John Gassner's term—"lilting" passages that disturb the structure, it seems quite apt to consider the validity of the criticism.

Jacques Barzun comments that O'Casey's "prose, which is as artificial as that of *Finnegans Wake*, was invented by John M. Synge half a century ago . . ." Conversely, Raymond Williams in his *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* asserts that, "The distance between the language of O'Casey and the language of poetic drama is considerable; but perhaps a more significant distance is that between his language and that of Synge." Mr. Williams is probably the more correct, for the difference between the language of Synge and O'Casey becomes apparent in *Purple Dust* in several passages in which O'Casey consciously parodies Synge. For instance, when Avril makes her second entrance in Act I, "She adopts a free-and-easy and very unnatural attitude when she is talking to the workmen." She attempts a Gaelic bonhomie by crying out, "Top o' the mornin', boys!" and O'Killigain "humoring her" replies in the Synge brogue: "Same to you, miss, an' many of them, each of them fairer an' finer than the finest of all that ever brought the soft light o' the dawn at the peep o' day into your openin' eyes." Avril replies, "It's meself that hopes you like the lovely house you're renovatin'."



And O'Killigain then says, "An' tell me who wouldn't like the lovely house we're renovatin'? It's a dark man he'd be, without a stim o' light, an' destitute o' feelin'."

Williams, criticizing the normal speech of O'Casey's characters, says:

Speech of this kind depends on a few simple tricks: on alliteration, which frequently over-rides or dictates the sense . . . on simple word-play . . . and on a few keywords which are surprisingly recurrent, and which carry "poetic" associations: *shining, dread, darkness, death, shroud*. As comic abuse, such language is frequently effective: it has some similarity with the sub-scenes of clown-abuse in many Elizabethan plays. But it can rarely carry any dramatic weight.

The first lines of Mr. Williams' criticism could well be applied to Gerard Manley Hopkins. What could be more alliterated than the admired line in *The Windhover*, "kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon"? What could be more thickly rhymed than the line in *God's Grandeur*, "And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil"? And one might question whether words with "Poetic" associations are necessarily bad in themselves. One may find such "Poetic" words as rich, trees, mountains, night, dark, summer, cool, storm, all in the second paragraph of *Farewell to Arms*.

Williams continues, however:

When real impressiveness is sought, the dramatist draws on rhythms and phrases which are already charged with emotional associations . . . Essentially, this is a device of the same kind as O'Casey's use of songs in his play-structures. In *The Plough and the Stars*, Bessie Burgess dies singing *I do believe, I will believe, that Jesus died for me*. Nora is led away

in her distraction to the singing of *Lead Kindly Light*, and the final emotion of the play is expressed in a song:

And although our 'eart is breaking,  
Make it sing this cheery song:  
Keep the 'owme fires burning . . . etc.

One might point out that if drawing on rhythms and phrases which are already charged with emotional associations is bad, "The Wasteland" is bad. Also, if Nora's being led off singing in her madness is bad, what of Shakespeare's Ophelia?

It would be absurd to deny that O'Casey's prose does not have its turgid moments, but the point to understand is the reason for both its turgidity and its eloquence. O'Casey's prose gets flat particularly when it deals with abstractions, as it does mainly in *Within the Gates*. As Barzun says: "Whenever he emits what he believes is an idea it is so put that we hardly notice it save through a pang of boredom; and whenever he embroiders that same idea, he crystallizes feeling, which infallibly recaptures our attention." Mr. Barzun becomes bored more easily than I do, but he has a point. In other words, O'Casey's prose may certainly be criticized, but the criticism must be on other grounds than those which Mr. Williams suggests. In the first place, O'Casey's language is not all of one piece. As the Synge parody suggests, several levels of language and several contrasting styles are frequently employed. What Gassner calls "liling" is evident, for instance, in the long speech of the Second Workman in Act II of *Purple Dust*:

That was in the days o' Finn Mac Coole, before his hair was scarred with a hint o' grey; the mighty Finn, I'm sayin', who stood as still as a stone in th' heart of a hill to hear the cry of

a curlew over th' cliffs o' Erris, the song of the blackbird, the cry o' the hounds hotfoot afther a boundin' deer, the steady wail o' the waves tumblin' in on a lonely shore; the mighty Finn who'd surrendher an emperor's pomp for a place with the bards, and the gold o' the King o' Greece for a night asleep be the sthream of Assaroe!

This speech is not the speech which Synge "invented." It lacks most of the mannerisms like "Surely it tis" and "It's herself has done it" that are most characteristic of Synge. O'Casey depends not only upon alliteration, but also on parallelism, on long vowels, and on a loose dactylic meter.

Further, Williams comments that O'Casey has "a certain adjectival drunkenness; when bullets smash the glass, they must be described as

tinklin' through th' *frightened* windows."

A glance at the 2nd Workman's speech, which is fairly typical, reveals much less dependence upon adjectives than upon nouns and past participles. The adjectives used are not poetic personifications, but either evocatively necessary like "steady wail" or tonally justified like "lonely shore."

O'Casey has never devoted any extensive comments to prose style, but sometimes, tucked away obscurely in an essay, succinct and random comments appear. For instance, in *The Green Crow*, he taxes Valentin Iremonger for bad writing:

Valentin Iremonger, a writer himself, commenting in the *Irish Times*, says, with hand on his troubled heart and a tear in his poetic eye, "I am still young enough to feel sorry—and a little angry—watching genius being squandered away and frittered away upon ephemeral concepts such as Mr.

O'Casey has elected to promulgate." Imagine "electing to promulgate ephemeral concepts"! Still there's dignity and sorrow in the sentence. But comicality too. As if Father O'Flynn, putting his blackthorn in his pocket, said, suddenly, "Th' time for jokin's past—we must be sarious now." Mr. Iremonger is, presumably, a young fellow, so here's a bit of advice from an old one: Let him think a little longer before he writes some of his sentences. He is young enough to learn to write more clearly.

On the next page, O'Casey comments:

This critic heads his commentary with the title of "Rude Mechanicals." What are "mechanicals," and when do they become "rude"? Conversely, what are gentle and good-natured mechanicals?

In *The Flying Wasp*, O'Casey comments upon a seemingly lucid passage by James Agate:

I see, by the way, that Sean O'Casey has just declared that "Noel Coward hasn't yet put even his nose into the front rank of second-class dramatists, let alone into the front rank of first-class dramatists." Were I a dramatist of genius like Mr. O'Casey I think I should try to say something more generous about Mr. Coward.

Mr. Agate is not sure, for he says, "I think I should try." Now what does "more generous" mean? Does it mean a generosity that would push Mr. Coward plumb into the front rank of second-class dramatists, or should it go further, and push him plumb into the front rank of first-class dramatists? Or does it mean that the work of Mr. Coward deserves a place in one of these ranks, and if so, which one?

In *Sunset and Evening Star*, O'Casey writes of a review by George Orwell of *Inishfallen Fare Thee Well*:

This logos of lamentation [Orwell] complains that the book is so written "as to make it difficult to pin down the facts of chronology." Facts of chronology is damn good. But there are quite a lot of facts of chronology that haven't been even pinned up yet.

In an unpublished letter to David Krause, O'Casey writes of "a 'drama critic' of THE IRISH PRESS, a lad who has been born without, or has deprived himself of, the power to think out, not only a review, but even a sentence."

From these indications of O'Casey's awareness of good and bad prose, one may see that criteria exist for O'Casey even though he has never enunciated them. It is, of course, not necessary or even desirable for a writer to talk about the essentials of a good style; it is sufficient that he write well. Let us consider, then, a passage of straight prose narration from *I Knock at the Door*. The passage occurs on pages three and four and is the conclusion of what is essentially several pages of dialogue as self-contained and tightly done as the most rigorously written lyric poem.

And the woman in child-pain clenched her teeth, dug her knees home into the bed, became a tense living mass of agony and effort, sweated and panted, pressed and groaned and pressed and pressed till a man child dropped from her womb down into a world that was filled up with the needs, ambitions, desires, and ignorances of others, to be shoved aside, pressed back, beaten down by privileges carrying godwarrants of superiority because they had dropped down into the world a couple of hours earlier. The privileges were angry and irritable; but the round-bellied, waggie-headed, lanky-legged newborn latecomer kicked against the ambitions, needs, and desires of the others, cleared a patch of room for itself from the trampling feet and snapping hands around it;



and so grew gradually, and gathered to itself the power, the ignorance, the desire, and the ambition of man.

First, let us hone the passage down, restating the author's thoughts in shorter phrasing, yet retaining his syntax and his sense as much as possible:

A woman delivered a child into a world filled with needs, ambition, desire and ignorance. The child grew gradually and gathered to itself the power, the ignorance, the desire, and the ambition of man.

The effect of the original paragraph seems by its generalizations which are here specifically presented (*nota bene*, Mr. Barzun)—round-bellied, waggle-headed . . . trampling feet, snapping hands—to be the presentation of a ritual act. Indeed, this paragraph purposely repeats part of the book's first paragraph—"A mother in child-pain clenched her teeth, dug her knees home into the bed, sweated and panted and grunted, became a tense living mass of agony and effort, groaned and pressed and groaned and pressed a little boy out of her womb into a world where . . ." So that the author evidently intends a ritualization or understanding in terms of an immemorial human process. And further, having established this pattern for recognition, the author then wants to give us a feeling about it. In other words, the second sentence, with its phrase "the power, the ignorance, the desire, and the ambition of man" which is reminiscent of the "needs, ambitions, desires, and ignorances of others" of the first sentence not only intends to establish the ritual feeling more firmly, but also by its dramatically rhetorical positioning to imply something about the indomitability of human nature. Now, none of this is, of course, carried by my shortened version. And

indeed, most of it is only implied in the original, and it is implied primarily by sentence structure. The paragraph is in two sentences. The first sentence establishes by the pattern "groaned, and pressed and pressed" the ritual. The second sentence is periodic, its sense and completion held back until the end, as also the sense and completion of the baby's struggle to live is held back; the holding back is emphasized by series—round-bellied; was washed, nap-kined, and fed; added on three, four, or five ounces—and by parallelisms—"from the trampling feet and snapping hands." The sentence is finally resolved in the closing phrasing which gains sonorousness by several means—by the alliteration of g's and the repetition of long a's in "grew gradually, and gathered," and also by the slow, held-back phrase, "the power, the ignorance, the desire, and the ambition of man," instead of, for instance, "man's power, ignorance, desire, and ambition." So, that actually the importance of the baby as a human being is implied by many rhetorical devices subtly fused into a complexly written, yet tight sentence. The only thing in the sentence that seems dispensable is perhaps the word "newborn" which precedes "latecomer." I would agree with the probable necessity of another adjective here, but the adjective should be one which qualifies and defines the noun rather than which merely repeats the sense of the noun.

Let us consider a passage from O'Casey's last book of autobiography, *Sunset and Evening Star*. The passage occurs at the very end of the volume, in a sort of emotional coda which does not possess the complex rhetoric of the passage we have just examined or seem to intend to be emotional or anything more than illustrative.

A short time ago, he had watched two big, handsome bees, delicately furred and red-banded, in the yellow center of the

crimson dahlia disk, one bee in its core, the other on its fringe. Honey-drunk and half dead they seemed to be. After a long time, the furry fellow on the fringe sleepily began to press himself deeper into the yellow core of the crimson disk, his twitching legs moving about to get a firmer grip, touching the other fellow's legs in the centre, who, with the tiniest show of irritation, shoved them twitchingly aside, just as a woman in the honey-hush of sleep might sleepily shove away from her body the wandering legs of her husband.

The intention of the author in this passage seems to be a vivid presentation of two bees on a dahlia. To achieve the recognition, the author first describes the bees, then describes their actions, and finally attempts to clinch his description with a simile.

Let us see whether any of the elements of the description can be eliminated. The phrase, "a short time ago," is irreducible. "He had watched" is syntactically necessary. "Two big, handsome bees." "Two" and "bees" are necessary. If we leave the word "big" out, we leave out part of the essential being of the bees. If we quarrel with the flat choice of "big" then it is necessary to suggest an alternative. "Huge." "Enormous." But they were not. They were just big. They might be large bees, but large is no better a word than big.

"Handsome"—If the bees are "delicately furred and red-banded," there might be some reason for eliminating "handsome." However, as we normally do not think of bees as at all handsome, and as their handsomeness is necessary for the design of the bees on the colorful inner disk of the flower, there is a potent reason for the author to underscore his description or to indicate what he intends his description to do.

". . . in the yellow centre of the crimson dahlia disk"

—the only word which might be challenged here is “disk,” and it seems justified because it adds form to the color; it increases the visual image.

“ . . . one bee in its core, the other on its fringe”—the only word that might be cut is “its,” but then the phrase would call unwanted attention to itself. If the author is going to describe the bees, it is probably better to describe them specifically, rather than vaguely. Consequently, all the words here are necessary.

“Honey-drunk and half dead they were”—the two most noticeable quirks about this sentence are the coined word and the inverted syntax. Here, it is necessary to refer to the context from which this section is taken. It occurs in a passage which seems primarily to be intended to portray nostalgia at the passing of youth and vigor. This passing is somewhat commonly suggested by the traditional parallel of spring and summer to youth. The bees in the beautiful flower are meant to be emblems of man in his youth, and “honey-drunk” is the old man’s view of youth. Consequently, the coinage is probably justified. The inversion, of course, puts the important words in a position of emphasis, but whether or not the increased importance offsets the slight awkwardness is debatable.

“After a long time” might possibly be reduced to “At last” or “Finally,” although neither of these seems as appropriate or specific.

“. . . the furry fellow . . . crimson disk” seems to utilize each word, either from necessities of syntax, necessities of description (“sleepily”), or from careful repetition which serves to insist on the precision of the drawing.

“. . . his twitching legs . . . twitchingly aside” seems to utilize every word. Most of the words are nouns and verbs and, therefore, irreducible. “With the tiniest show of irritation” can scarcely be reduced to the adverb “irritatedly,” for the precise degree of irritation would be missed,

and everything in the description insists on a close precision which "the tiniest show" gets. The adjectives are not flowery. The exact words are chosen and are re-used if necessary—"twitching—twitchingly."

". . . just as a woman . . ."—the final simile of the section is chosen with a similar exactness. The bees have been pictured as honey-drunk and moving slowly—"after a long time," being stupefied with summer. Therefore, the repetition of "in the honey-hush of sleep might sleepily shove" is necessary and right, and the insertion of, for instance, "drowsily" would lessen the evocation of a hypnotically muted state. "Honey-hush" might in many circumstances seem only coy, but it here seems valid by indicating precisely the state of sleep and by connecting the simile even more closely with its referent. Although matters of sound are dangerous pitfalls to discuss, the use of aspirates and sibilants in the line seems too pronounced to be anything but conscious. The necessity of the adjective "wandering" can be easily proven by reading the line without the word, and, further, "the wandering legs of her husband" seems preferable to the only possible shortened form, "her husband's wandering legs," because of the rightness of a slowing down in the last sentence, a slowing down intensified by the voiced lip stop of the "b" and the voiced apex stop of the "d" in "husband."

This paragraph is not flamboyant rhetoric; its intention is not the evocation of strong emotion. Rather, the paragraph intends by words precisely chosen to paint an exact miniature. The author seems brilliantly to have succeeded, for the paragraph is nearly irreducible, almost what Herbert Read calls a Gestalt. If further proof is needed, the reader might attempt a revision of precisely the same action, but using his own simile and his own words. It must be stressed again that this is not an important paragraph and, in context, not a particularly memorable one; it is merely



the quiet and unobtrusive triumph of a consummate stylist. It is work so impeccable that, like the prose of Swift, it does not call attention to its excellences.

No discussion of O'Casey's style would be complete without an analysis of an example of his most flamboyant stage dialogue or of one of the so-called Joycean passages in the autobiographies. Juno's brilliant "Mother o' God" speech is too well known and admired to bother with, and, indeed, the later plays, which have been too much ignored, can offer us abundant examples. Foorawn's speech to Manus in the last act of *The Bishop's Bonfire*, for instance, is a dramatic Chekhovian shift of mood and a revelation of character: "You ruffian!" following in the best melodramatic tradition of the scene and abruptly broken by "Oh Manus, darlin', I'm shot." But, perhaps as typically O'Caseyan is a long speech of Feelim O'Morrigan in the lesser-known play *Oak Leaves and Lavender*. In Act III, after Feelim learns that his son has been shot down in the battle of Britain, Feelim says in part:

Th' damned villains, bloodied all over with th' rent-out lives of child an' woman! They owe Feelim O'Morrigan a son; an', be Christ! old as he is, he'll help to make them pay to th' uttermost farthing in th' blood of their youngest an' their best! Let their bombs explode, an' wreck an' tear, an' tumble everything! It'll take more than they can make an' carry to punch us out of where we stand to fight them! Hearts of steel, well tempered with hate, is what we are today—hearts of steel! Hearts of oak don't last; so hearts of steel we are! . . . Ay, from now on to fight, harry, an' rend th' Germans till they're glad to go goose-steppin' into th' grave! Here on this spot, at this moment, Feelim O'Morrigan takes up th' fight where Drishogue laid it down! . . . A cap-badge an' a few buttons are all that's left of my boy!

The tone of the speech is a rant that falls awkwardly on our ears. This type of speech is effective mostly for the thoughtless mob. O'Casey, however, saves it brilliantly from being a stock propaganda tirade such as one might find in a play like *The Star Turns Red*. He saves the speech by the last sentence, which is completely different in tone from the preceding ones and which entirely erases their awkwardness. The first sentences are a sort of madness which we find motivated in the last sentence. Consider how false the speech would be if the last sentence were written first. As the speech stands, however, it serves to illuminate character with an abrupt, almost contradictory, shift. In one sense, the speech may seem to belong to the realm of character-creating more than it does to the realm of rhetoric. But the ferocity of the first part could only have been effective if the right things were done. And the tremendous power and implication of the last sentence derives not from a violent show of sorrow, but from a completely nonviolent understatement that follows a violent exaggeration. There is a sort of tension between the two portions. Part of this tension derives from the expectation for a fierce climax set up by the body of the speech, and the surprise at the defeat of the expectation. As such, the speech is witty, for it depends upon the stock device of wit—building up an expectation and then swiftly negating the expectation. There is also a tension between the tone and style of the two parts. The tone and style of the first part is, of course, fierce and flamboyant, while that of the second is muted and simple. It has long been a critical cliché that O'Casey is only good in his boisterous, neo-Elizabethan speeches. The example, however, just cited is one of many instances in which O'Casey secures his effects in a surprisingly quiet manner and by a prose as simple and effective as Swift's.

Effective writing is not, despite Randall Jarrell's essays on Whitman and Frost, a succession of beautiful moments or of well-turned phrases that may be extrapolated and sniffed admiringly for their individual charm or wit. Rather, as is well exemplified in Herbert Read's *English Prose Style*, good writing is a consistency and a cumulative effect over a long haul. To clinch my case about O'Casey's stylistic control, then, I should like to quote and to examine an extended passage and to show that the passage is what Read would call a Gestalt, a perfectly achieved form. In *The Flying Wasp*, there is a chapter, which O'Casey unfortunately did not reprint in *The Green Crow*, called "Sainte-Beuve, Patron of Poor Playwriters, Pray for Us!" The latter portion of this chapter is a satiric, little parable which is as perfect a thing as O'Casey has done in as short a space anywhere.

The Little Playwriters lived in the City of Dewymondroit. They were fed on dewberry dust and doughnuts specially made for them by the tribe of Criticonians who acted as their guardians in the daytime, and as their nurses at night. The Little Playwriters lived in dainty houses made of spun-glass, and when the sun shone these spun-glass houses were radiant with many colours so that each Little Playwriter looked like a little lizard encased deep in a diamond. In the midst of these fairy dwellings was a spun-glass house that outshone all the others, bigger and wider, with glittering tall turrets in the middle and at the ends, many, many cubits high so that they seemed to touch the lower stars. Over a tall and narrow archway was the name of this spun-glass house, and it was called Conversation Piece. And when the writer who lived in this spun-glass house wrote anything, the people from far and near came in gold and silver cars, aluminum cars, and cars of radium, to listen and applaud. And these spun-glass houses were air-tight, for air when it entered overcame these

Little Playwriters so that they died. When all was quiet, and everybody was at work, the Little Playwriters came out to bathe in little lily-pools, and, under the care of the Criticonians, to do a simple exercise by going round and round a mulberry bush.

Now a few living on the outskirts of Dewymondroit envied these Little Playwriters and mocked them as often as the chance came their way to so do, and these evil ones would try to smash the spun-glass houses and destroy the beauty that so many loved, and which made the City famous the whole world over. But the Criticonians kept a good watch and suffered no one in any way suspicious to enter the City, for fear that the spun-glass might be splintered and the Little Playwriters perish miserably from the cold air that swept in when a spun-glass house was cracked. All who were allowed within sight of the spun-glass houses had to show a deep knowledge of the one hundred folio volumes on Generosity to Little Playwriters written by Sainte-Beuve, the Patron of Poor Plays, which had been made legal enactments by the Masters among the Criticonians; and anyone who ventured to dispute even one passage from these laws, was banished for ever far from the City of Dewymondroit. The Headman of the Criticonians was named Agatio Sagacius, who went about dressed in robes of black and white as a constant reminder to the Poor Playwriters that everything they wrote about must be either in black or white so that it might be easily understood of the simple people, and so that the Criticonians themselves shouldn't be brain-wrecked trying to make out what it all meant. On the breast of the black robe worn by Agatio was a triangle, and in the center of the triangle was the one word, Noel. Round the border of his white skirt were embroidered the mystic words, *Dum Spiro Spinerio*, and in a square on the back of his robe were the names Pirandello, Eugene O'Neill, and O'Casey, broken by a Pinerojovian thunderbolt. Three times a day he went up

to the top of the highest of the spun-glass turrets and called the people to prayer, saying, *Nom de plume de la Sainte-Beuve, c'est magnifique, c'est loi martiale, droit commun et droit des gens et droit des Dramamamannakeens*; while the lesser Masters of the Criticonians read the laws of generosity for Poor Playwriters, written by Sainte-Beuve, to all the people gathered together, sitting on their bums in the marketplace of Dewymondroit.

And peace polished the City for many years and the Little Playwriters dwelt at ease in their spun-glass houses. And it came to pass that a dwarf called Seaninus of the tribe of Milé, who live in a rocky isle beside a turbulent sea, journeyed one day to Dewymondroit. And when he saw the Dramamamannakeens living in their spun-glass houses, like tiny lizards in the midst of diamonds, he hated them in his heart; and he fashioned a stout sling of mountain ash and swift-stretching gut, gathering stones round and smooth, with sharp edges, and hid them in his home in a cave. When night came, and all men slept, except the Criticonians, he ventured forth, fixing stones in his sling and let fly, sending a number of the spun-glass houses tinkling down to the great discomfort and alarm of the Dramamamannakeens, and taking the guard of the Criticonians by surprise. As the Criticonians ran screaming hither and thither, Seaninus fixed a smooth stone with sharp edges, and letting fly, smote the turrets of the spun-glass house that was wider and loftier than all the others, and the turrets came tinkling down, and the people ran about crying out in great terror, Behold this is the end of Dewymondroit! And the Criticonians came and laid hands on Seaninus and they bound him hand and foot with the laws of Sainte-Beuve so that he was helpless. And they took counsel together, saying, What is to be done with this disturber, for, verily, if we leave him loose, he will surely destroy the spun-glass beauty of Dewymondroit? And they all with one voice said, banish him for ever from this sacred place; let him wander



a stranger and an outcast among the waste places in the weary desert of Blumsburi. Then they branded on his brow the words, This fellow wants us better than we want to be. Then they bound the lowbrow plays of Shakespeare round the neck of Seaninus as a testimony against him, and cast him forth from their sacred places for ever. The Dramamamanakeens, or, the Little Playwriters, rejoiced greatly; they made Agatio Sagacius Major Mayor of the City of Spunglass Houses, and peace came again to Dewymondroit.

I think that the passage might stand, without further comment, as a touchstone to prove my point about O'Casey's mastery of style. However, one might say that the passage is a Gestalt for two reasons. As satire, the passage perfectly embodies two tones. The first is the tone of Swiftean simplicity and auctorial detachment, such as one finds in unaffected masters of style like Malory, DeFoe, Aesop and the anonymous authors of fairy tales. In other words, the style is a telling pastiche of a kind of writing, which may be well illustrated by any of the above authors or by this passage from Robert Southey:

The little old woman had heard in her sleep the great, rough, gruff voice of the Great, Huge Bear; but she was so fast asleep that it was no more to her than the roaring of wind, or the rumbling of thunder. And she had heard the middle voice of the Middle Bear, but it was only as if she had heard someone speaking in a dream. But when she heard the little, small, wee voice of the Little, Small, Wee Bear, it was so sharp, and so shrill, that it awakened her at once. Up she started; and when she saw the Three Bears on one side of the bed, she tumbled herself out at the other, and ran to the window. Now the window was open, because the Bears, like good, tidy Bears, as they were, always opened their bed-chamber window when they got up in the morning. Out the

little old woman jumped; and whether she broke her neck in the fall; or ran into the wood and was lost there; or found her way out of the wood, and was taken up by the constable and sent to the House of Correction for a vagrant as she was, I cannot tell. But the Three Bears never saw anything more of her.

The style of the Southey passage is precisely the style of the O'Casey passage. However, the tone of the Southey passage is slightly more sophisticated than, say, the tone of Aesop or Malory. For, by references to "like good, tidy Bears, as they were," and "the House of Correction," a faint breaking of the tone of simplicity by a moderate flicker of whimsey is implied. Whimsey, of course, is the mildest form of irony—irony with the bite gone. Whimsey implies that a double meaning is intended by the writer and understood by the reader. Hence, both Southey and his readers are rather more sophisticated than, say, Aesop and his readers. There is a tension in the Southey passage, wrought by these slight touches, and the tension renders the passage as a quaint game and a suspension of disbelief is necessary. The tension is wrought by the two tones—the obvious simplicity and the underlying sophistication. The story has come down to us from Southey in a revised and unsophisticated Aesopian form, a completely serious form, one-dimensional and with no tension of opposing tones.

The O'Casey passage is even more sophisticated than the Southey one because the intensity of the O'Casey passage gives not a faint and fleeting whimsey, but a vigorous and scathing irony. While O'Casey uses the same style as Aesop or Southey, the distance between his style and his effect is much greater than the distances between their styles and their effects. The style and effect of a work by Aesop are one, the style and effect of Southey's Three Bears are slightly apart, and the style and effect of the O'Casey pas-

sage, approaches the fiercest passages in the fourth book of *Gulliver's Travels* and are quite far apart.

The styles of Aesop, of Southey, and of O'Casey are similar and excellent, and Herbert Read and Robert Graves would probably say that they are in the best tradition of English prose and much better than, say, the verbal and syntactical gymnastics of John Lyly, Dr. Johnson (in his pompous moments), Thomas Carlyle, or Virginia Woolf. Of the three styles, Aesop's is the simplest, Southey's is somewhat more difficult, and O'Casey's is finally the most difficult of all, the most formally controlled, the wittiest and, hence, the most civilized. In other words, O'Casey commands one of the best controlled and most masterly styles in modern literature.

## 9

### THEORIES AND ESTIMATES

Since his first success when he was about forty, Sean O'Casey has written twelve full-length plays, about twelve more one-acts, not all of which have been published, six long volumes of autobiography, perhaps half a dozen short stories, three collected volumes of miscellaneous pieces, many more fugitive pieces hidden away in the back files of magazines and newspapers, and countless brilliantly written letters in his own racy idiom, letters that we may fervently hope will someday be collected and published.

Despite an often distinguished success in other fields, O'Casey is chiefly a dramatist. Long passages of the autobiographies, as O'Casey's recording of passages and the dramatic readings in New York suggest, seem actually abortive plays. Since it is as a dramatist that he will be primarily assessed by the future, our problem here would seem twofold: to analyze his experimental theory and to suggest the value of his work and its place in modern dramatic literature.

O'Casey's dramatic theory is not complex, and its main tenets may be easily deduced from the plays or found in random comments in the essays. An esthetic O'Casey does have, despite the cardinal cliché of his detractors that he was an untutored lout who blundered into the creation of

two early masterpieces and also despite his frequent assumption, like one of his enthusiasms, Whitman, of an unlettered pose. When asked direct questions about his dramatic structure or practice, he is likely to refer, as he did in a letter to me, to "the knowledge of a scholar, which I'm far from having . . . Don't know what Catastasis, etc. mean. Never met them. 'The golden rule' said Shaw, 'is that there is no rule.' Amen, say I."

This statement sounds rather more sweeping than in his actual practice it is. There are no rules of any dramatic convention that may not be broken; this is what O'Casey means and this is what he has done—broken the rules of dramatic realism. In the place of one convention he attempts to establish another; indeed, he attempts to create another. *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* has a form and there are rules to that form. *The Drums of Father Ned* and *The Bishop's Bonfire* may break most of the rules of dramatic realism, but they abide by most of the rules of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*.

I do not attack O'Casey's refusal to speak specifically of his dramatic practice or accuse him of inability to speak of it. There is no reason for the artist to do the critic's job. Indeed, after some of the explanations of Mr. Saroyan and M. Ionesco, we should be grateful for O'Casey's silence. And, indeed, in these days of the Intentional Fallacy, we should probably remember D. H. Lawrence's exhortation, "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it."

O'Casey is the kind of writer whose personality shines luminously through his work. Some of the facets of that personality suggest that he would be a very poor critic. He has, for instance, an erratic taste. He admires the bathos and melodrama of a Boucicault or creates and subsequently defends a *Star Turns Red* or a *Within the Gates*.



He has a very real wisdom gained by experience and intuition, but he is no thinker. His essays are brilliantly lucid in style, but often exceptionally muddy in logic. Despite these faults—and sometimes in O'Casey these faults become magically transformed into his greatest virtues—he is a conscious artist who has a fair idea of what he wants to do and an excellent idea of what he does not. From the plays and the essays we can extract a few coherent, though simple, principles:

1. The drama must be "full of life."
2. The drama must be experimental.
3. Dramatic realism is exhausted.
4. Anti-realistic genres and methods offer hope for the drama.
5. Within a play these anti-realistic genres and methods may be juxtaposed with startling effectiveness.
6. This juxtaposition is the key to the structure of the experimental play.

Let me give a few quotations, culled from many, in which O'Casey expresses these sentiments:

1. "The newer form in drama . . . gives rise to a new form of acting, a new form of production, a new response in the audience; author, actors and audience will be in communion with each other—three in one and one in three. If a play is what it ought to be it must be a religious function . . ." (*N. Y. Times*, Oct. 21, 1934).

1. "I like the term 'uncontrolled explosions'. It is something, at least, to cause an explosion, even an 'uncontrolled' one. I hope every play I write may have an explosion as its kernel: the bigger & louder bang the better; or, at least, strong enough to shake down the dust" (Letter to Robert Hogan, 14 Sept., 1956).

1. "To me what is called naturalism, or even realism, isn't enough. They usually show life at its meanest and commonest, as if life never had time for a dance, a laugh

or a song. I always thought that life had a lot of time for these things, for each was a part of life itself; and so I broke away from realism . . ." (*N. Y. Times*, Nov. 16, 1958).

2. ". . . the drama must change and develop a new outlook, a broader scope, and a fresh style, if it is to live as an art alongside the art of architecture, of painting, and of music." (*The Green Crow*).

2. "Dramatists cannot go on imitating themselves, and, when they get tired of that, imitating others. They must change, must experiment, must develop their power, or try to, if the drama is to live" (*The Green Crow*).

3. "Gay, farcical, comic or tragical, it must be, not the commonplace portrayal of the trivial events in the life of this man or that woman, but a commentary of life itself. This is the main thing to be done if drama of today is to be in the main stream of the great drama of the past. To achieve this the veneration of realism, or, as Archer called it, pure imitation, must cease, and imagination be crowned queen of the drama again" (*N. Y. Times*, Oct. 21, 1934).

3. "Not of course that a fine play, or even a great play, may not again be written by a newer dramatist in the 'realistic' manner; but it will need to be a fine one to lift itself from the sameness of the tens of thousands of realistic or naturalistic plays that have gone before it . . ." (*The Green Crow*).

4 & 5. "The newer form in drama will take qualities found in classical, romantic, and expressionistic plays, will blend them together, breathe the breath of life into the new form and create a new drama" (*N. Y. Times*, Oct. 21, 1934).

6. "In my opinion, the time has passed for a drama to devote its expression to one aspect of life alone, and to consider that aspect of life as dominant for the time the play takes to unfold itself; that in one play one aspect of

life must be the beginning, the middle, and the end of it. Consistency of mood and of manner isn't always, indeed, not even often, found in life, and why should it then be demanded in a play? . . . A jewel moved about in the hand shows many flashes of light and color; and the human life, moved about by circumstances of tragedy and comedy, shows more than many flashes of diversity in the unity of its many-sided nature. Of course, a great play may be written around one aspect of life, but it doesn't follow that this must be the one way forever . . ." (*The Green Crow*).

I know of no other modern dramatist who has so cogently stated his position and charted his course. Bernard Shaw, who had less to say about theory than one might expect, chose as his central postulate that art is the best possible means of propaganda or, in other words, that art is not art. Fortunately his practice frequently belied his theory. The comments of some playwrights—Brecht, Ionesco, Williams, Miller, Saroyan, Anderson—who have been voluble about theory are often enigmatic, whimsical, and sometimes utterly irresponsible. Some other playwrights—among them van Druten, Priestley, and Maugham—are mainly concerned with the broad technical aspects of conventional plays.

There has been little seminal or systematic theorizing even among the critics. Eric Bentley and Walter Kerr, for instance, attempt no more than O'Casey does—to diagnose the illness and to prescribe a remedy. O'Casey's remedy, incidentally, might well be one about which those two rather opposed critics could find some common agreement.

I do not want to puff O'Casey's theories up into more than they are, but those theories combined with the examples of the later plays are about the most intelligent and coherent reaction to the dreary plight of the contemporary theater.

I should like to make just two additional comments about facets of O'Casey's theory. In the "red" plays it seemed that he had accepted the tenets of social realism for his theme and pure Expressionism for his manner. By 1950 his attitude had changed, and he wrote in "The Play of Ideas" controversy in *The New Statesman*:

The plays written around the new life must be currents in the mainstream of drama, must be an offspring of the great tradition. When we decide . . . to play at being proletarians, then let us play at being them, and not send them forth as lecturers in an academy hall, preachers in a pulpit, or speakers from a political platform, important as these activities may be.

This statement, in addition to the evidence of the plays themselves, is another indication of the man's growth.

Second, perhaps the most memorable facet of O'Casey's dramatic equipment is his technique of juxtaposition of divers genres and divers moods, a technique that first struck people in the brilliant blending of comedy and tragedy that concluded *Juno and the Paycock*. He nowhere comments on the reaction he hopes to obtain from the audience, but he has occasionally justified the practice. For instance, *The Randolph-Macon Bulletin* in 1954 printed a letter in which O'Casey wrote:

As for blending "Comedy with Tragedy," it's no new practice—hundreds have done it, including Shakespeare up to Dion Boucicault in, for instance "Collen Bawn" & "Conn, the Shaughraun." And, indeed, Life is always doing it, doing it, doing it. Even where one lies dead, laughter is often heard in the next room. There's no tragedy that isn't tinged with humour, no comedy that hasn't its share of tragedy—if one has eyes to see, ears to hear. Sorrow & Joy are sisters, though

Joy isn't always Joy or Sorrow Sorrow; they change appearance often & rapidly.

Hundreds have done it, yes; but only a dozen or so have done it well. This perception is perhaps O'Casey's finest dramatic insight, and it has immeasurably more vitality than his affirmations of life and joy. It allows for a free play of ironic tension to bind action meaningfully together and to produce occasionally an effect comparable to that of tragedy. The closest comparison I can think of to the ending of *The Plough and the Stars* is the ending of Chaplin's *City Lights*. Bittersweet is too sloppy a word to characterize the result, which, after all, has much of the toughness of tragedy. The technique is a subtle one and requires not only the deep insight of the profound and sensitive artist, but also a highly intellectualized sense of the possibilities of the drama. The men who utilize this technique successfully work by rules, but the rules are their own.

How good is O'Casey, and where does he stand in relation to his contemporaries, in relation to modern drama? According to James Bridie, nowhere:

Nous petits maitres (Rattigan and myself) are lucky to have been set (by an accident of longevity) in the Shaw Era . . . We are on the point of removing into the era of Christopher Fry, and it would be a pity if we were utterly lost in transit.

Although Shaw lived until the middle of the century, what can actually be called the Shaw Era certainly lasted little later than 1923, when his last great play, *St. Joan*, was written. Indeed, Shaw's major plays had been written ten to twenty years earlier. If one is going to paste labels and distinguish eras, there would be great justice in putting the Shaw Era from about 1880 to 1925. Not only because of



the plays, but also because of his influential criticism and his championing of Ibsen, Shaw, if he did not assist at the birth of a new era, did much to kill an old one.

According to Walter Kerr, we are still under the Ibsen-Shaw influence. Agreed. But the example of the former and the proselytization of the latter are no longer enlivening influences. For the past thirty years dramatic realism has been the cold, dead hand injecting morphine into the fabulous invalid.

There have been reactions to the Ibsen-Shaw influence, and none was more notable than Ireland's dramatic renaissance, impelled in its great days by Yeats' hopes for a poetic drama. The Abbey had its few years of vigor, though, not because Yeats held stubbornly to his ideal, but because he constantly yielded. This is not to say that Yeats' endeavours were fruitless, for they bore Synge and O'Casey, the two modern dramatists whose plays most buoyantly and exuberantly were at odds with reigning tradition. Synge and O'Casey are not dramatists of a school, and it would be fruitless to make academic comparisons of works so individual that they resist comparison. It is only when compared to most of their contemporaries that these two figures draw closely together, for the quality their plays have in common is life. Whether Brendan Behan or Samuel Beckett (whom O'Casey has great respect for and of whom he wrote in a letter to the present writer, "I think Beckett a very clever writer, a very sad one, but intensely sincere") will enrich this tradition, it is too early to say, but it is a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Who are the other men of the theater who have been consistently experimental in outlook? Strindberg, Hauptmann, Pirandello, O'Neill. And not many more. Of these men, whose work is yet a vital force? Only, I think, O'Casey's and O'Neill's, and O'Neill's posthumous work, although it brilliantly reaffirms his reputation, is not not-

ably experimental. Yet O'Casey, with the great plays of his old age, is still in the vanguard of the modern theater. As Eric Bentley wrote:

If the plays Mr. O'Casey has been printing are increasingly "unproduceable" the reason . . . is that they've been increasingly unproduced; a playwright without a theatre is far too free. And yet we don't really know whether *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* is good theatre, bad, or indifferent, because we haven't tried it. There is also the question how good the theatre is in which it would be tried. A creative ensemble would be more interested in tackling a work that is not tied down by the habits of past performances, a work which demands, and will help to form, a new kind of performance. Where are the actors who will give us, not repetitions, nor even revivals, but discoveries? Do we reject O'Casey because as a communist he is beneath us or because as an artist he is beyond us?

For his part, O'Casey never intended or, to my mind, wrote closet drama. Of *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* he wrote, "The play, first of all is a play, irrespective of theme; and if it fails as a play, it fails altogether." And in *The Green Crow* he wrote:

Be sure, buttie, that though the British stage has neglected the dramatist, the dramatist didn't neglect the British stage; though Broadway turned her back on him, the dramatist didn't, hasn't, won't turn his back on Broadway.

Let me briefly summarize what I think is O'Casey's accomplishment: in his early plays—*The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock*, and *The Plough and the Stars*—he proved that Chekhovian structure was both copyable and capable of the greatest results. If his middle

plays—from *The Silver Tassie* to *Oak Leaves and Lavender* and excluding *Purple Dust*—were not successfully integrated, they did allow him to attempt juxtapositions and explore limitations of genres in a dazzling and unprecedented manner. Practically all of the rest is triumph. Although the playwright seemed to falter after the delightful *Purple Dust* in his war play *Oak Leaves and Lavender*, his mastery of his own pre-eminently individual form reasserted itself magnificently in his three most recent plays, *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, *The Bishop's Bonfire*, and *The Drums of Father Ned*. In these plays the dramatist reveals himself as a virtuoso of his form and renders three variations on a theme in a fashion more devastatingly exuberant than any we have lately been accustomed to.

Emotion on the modern stage has tended to understatement, to suppression, to implication. Only in the stylized form of the opera is there now scope for the raving that has been unfortunately lost. By his utilization of melodrama and heightened realism, by the introduction of the bizarre, the ludicrous, the grotesque and the fantastic, and by the witty and ironic juxtaposition of these elements, O'Casey throws a broad chest. John Gassner called his series of essays in *Theatre Arts*, "The Prodigality of Sean O'Casey," and the term is apt. The comparison of O'Casey to the Elizabethans has been worn to triteness, but it is still fitting.

It is obvious that we must not look to the makers of the well-made West End or Broadway play for drama, for we shall find only a smooth equability. We must look for the extremes, for the plays capable of low farce, inane laughter, arrant stupidities and breaches of taste; we must look for the dramatist capable of and unwilling to excise the most wretched pun and who will glory in the rolling sentence, the impassioned diatribe, and even the corny soliloquy; we must look for the audience that delights in the death

throes of Little Nell and the baying of the hounds after Eliza. The drama is never far removed from the naive grotesquerie of Harlequin and Pierrot, in which the ghastly and the gay, the banal and the beautiful, and the crude and the coy are jumbled together with a ram-bunctious relish of feeling and a bold bravura of thought.

Although O'Casey's later work has not been assimilated by the modern theater, his prestige remains great, and it seems safe to speculate that his reputation eventually will not be based solely on *Juno* and *The Plough*, to speculate that whether his later plays, given the productions they deserve, prove or do not prove of equal stature to his early masterpieces, O'Casey, together with Strindberg and O'Neill, will prove one of the great seminal forces of the drama of the future.

As I look over what I have written, I am struck by how much I have found to criticize in O'Casey's plays. That fact seems strange to me, for few plays in the modern repertoire have given me so much pleasure. I think that I have been unconsciously trying to counteract any impression that I am a hostile critic by making this last chapter as forcefully sympathetic as I could. And it occurs to me that this last chapter might embarrass O'Casey, for he embarrasses easily.

When I first read O'Casey I thought that he was a quarrelsome man ever ready to overwhelm an adverse criticism with a gush of Gaelic spleen. Now I am aware that most of that vehement combativeness was the result of as much abysmally stupid criticism as any three writers could expect in a lifetime. (I am not, incidentally, excepting this work from the possibility of abysmal stupidity.) And I am also conscious of how many times I have read an O'Caseyan comment like one he made in a letter to me on April 25, 1958:

Of course, you are right about the early verses (and about some of the later ones, too), but I am not ashamed of them, for I have a vital (and maybe everlasting) defence to make for them: If there be a God, and I was brought before Him by some aesthetic apostle to answer for them, I should say: Lord, they were the best I could do at the time; they were an effort towards the development of the talent which Thou Thyself hadst given me.

O'Casey wrote years ago in *The New York Times* that he wanted to be influenced by and compared to the best. He has succeeded, for his work, or at least most of it, will weather the harshest criticism. His work has constantly tended in the direction of freedom, of breaking down the forms and conventions of a stale tradition. In few other dramatists is there the vigor and the affirmation; and what seems most necessary to the perpetuation of a vital drama is an affirmative morality, an ethic coupled with exuberant presentation and daringly experimental conception. Where else can they be found but in the work of the man who said:

I'm just a wandering road-minstrel, singing an odd song at any cross-roads where a few people may have gathered together; an odd song in the form of a play, a few thoughts set out in the form of an article, or a song in the form of a song itself.



# Appendix:

## "THE SILVER TASSIE"

### CONTRIVERSY

Alas, pain, pain ever, for ever!

*Davoren*

Perhaps the most crucial incident affecting O'Casey's development as a dramatist was the widely publicized controversy that arose when the Directors of the Abbey Theatre rejected the dramatist's first Expressionist play, *The Silver Tassie*. The controversy is yet the subject of bickering between pro-Yeats and pro-O'Casey adherents,<sup>1</sup> but its chief significance lies in two facts: after the break, the Abbey, according to Peter Kavanagh, fell into a decline from which it has never recovered, and O'Casey, released from the demands of the realistic Abbey tradition, became irretrievably an experimental dramatist.

Peter Kavanagh sketches in the background of O'Casey's relationship with Yeats in his fine volume, *The Story of the Abbey Theatre*.

O'Casey as a person never was considered by Yeats. He was a slum dweller, not a garreteer, and Yeats, who had become growingly aristocratic in behavior, could not consider becoming a close friend of O'Casey, who was not even a poet. O'Casey, for his part, considered Yeats as a poseur, though

he recognized his ability as a poet. O'Casey could not respect a man who came to the theatre in full evening dress and patronized only the company of titled people.<sup>2</sup> Genius recognizes no rank other than itself, and O'Casey continued to protest Yeats' attitude by refusing to dress otherwise than in his cap and sweater.

There was no sense of camaraderie between O'Casey and Yeats—no human relationship—and since O'Casey had proved himself a playwright of the first order, his future obviously attached permanently to the Abbey, he felt he could only retain his sympathy for it by living well away from it. Accordingly, he went to live in London.<sup>3</sup>

In London, O'Casey married Eileen Carey, the actress, and settled down to a play whose subject was to be the First World War. On March 1, 1928, Lady Gregory noted in her Journal:

A letter from Sean O'Casey yesterday: "I've just finished writing and typing (in my own way) *The Silver Tassie*, and when I've got a couple of copies typed—which will be in about a fortnight's time—I'll send a copy to the Abbey and will send a copy to no one else till I get word that the play has been received, so that I may be able to say that the Abbey Theatre was the first to get my new effort. I hope it may be suitable and that you will like it. *Personally, I think it is the best work I have yet done.*"<sup>4</sup> I have certainly put my best into it, and have written the work solely because of love and a deep feeling that what I have written should have been written.<sup>5</sup>

Kavanagh reports:

Everyone thought O'Casey would never write another play after he left Ireland, and it was with some distrust that the

directors read his new play when it appeared. Robinson disliked it and wrote in his report, "I'm glad that he is groping towards a new manner—he couldn't go on writing slum plays forever and ever, but I wish the second half of his play was better." <sup>6</sup>

On March 28, Lady Gregory noted in her Journal:

Sean O'Casey's play came yesterday. I read it through. Well, I absolutely agree with Lennox Robinson's criticism, the beginning fine, *the two first acts*; <sup>7</sup> then such a falling off, especially in the last, the "persons" lost in rowdiness.

I must have written something like this to Lennox Robinson for he writes in return: "I was very relieved to get your letter to-day and to find that you agreed with me about O'Casey's play. If you had disagreed with me I should have suspected myself of all sorts of horrid sub-conscious feelings. I shall send the play at once to W. B. Yeats and avoid writing to Sean until he has read it. We can't do it before the end of this season and if W. B. agrees with you and me Sean will have time to think over his last acts before July and August. It looks to me as if he had put very careful work in to Acts I and II, and finished the other two acts haphazard because everyone was beginning to say he would never write a play again and he wanted to show that he could—but the play as it stands won't increase his reputation. I see the end of his play as a single tenement act with the maimed heroes back and everyone sorry they've come and the girl gone off with the other fellow. This is obvious, but the idea in Sean O'Casey's plays is always obvious; it is the treatment that makes the difference, makes the genius." <sup>8</sup>

Lady Gregory then sent the play to Yeats, who was at Rapallo, Italy. In the meantime, she remarked in her Journal for April 2:

And having written that agreement with Lennox Robinson, there came the next day such a very nice, warm-hearted, letter from S. O'C., written I don't know why, expecting to find me in depression. He says nothing about his play. I am glad for I don't want to write of it till Yeats has given his judgment. Lennox Robinson is sending it to him at once.<sup>9</sup>

And on April 22:

I have had another kind of letter from Sean O'Casey, chiefly of sympathy and suggestions about Hugh's pictures<sup>10</sup> . . . But I am a little sad because he supposes (rightly) that I have read his play sent to Lennox Robinson, by now: "I think it is by far the best work I have done. It is, I think, very different from my previous work. I am correcting proofs now and it will be published in a few months' time. You must take from me the first copy sent to anyone." And Lennox Robinson is abroad and I can't write until all—Starkie also<sup>11</sup>—give their opinion, and don't like to think he may print it without their criticism—and without seeing it on the stage.<sup>12</sup>

And finally on April 28:

Yesterday Yeats' letter came with his criticisms of Sean O'Casey's play. I've made a copy of it. It shows him in full (mental) health again. I have now sent it on to Sean. Of course, it must be a severe blow, but I believe he will feel its force, its "integrity," and be grateful in the end. I have sent him also Lennox Robinson's less forcible outcries and my own few words, all I had a copy of. I had to send them on at once because he had written that he was "correcting proofs" for publication. And I have sent a fourth letter, from Yeats to-day, with suggestions as to what words to use if he does publish it. But I had a bad night or early morning thinking of the disappointment and shock he will feel.<sup>13</sup>

Yeats's letter read:

82, Merrion-square,  
Dublin, April 20, 1928.

My Dear Casey,—

Your play was sent to me at Rapallo by some mistake of the Theatre's. It arrived just after I had left and was returned from there to Dublin. I had looked forward with great hope and excitement to reading your play, and not merely because of my admiration for your work, for I bore in mind that the Abbey owed its recent prosperity to you. If you had not brought us your plays just at that moment, I doubt if it would now exist. I read the first act with admiration, I thought it was the best first act you had written, and told a friend that you had surpassed yourself. The next night I read the second and third acts, and tonight I have read the fourth. I am sad and discouraged; you have no subject. You were interested in the Irish Civil War, and at every moment of those plays wrote out of your own amusement with life or your sense of its tragedy; you were excited, and we all caught your excitement; you were exasperated almost beyond endurance by what you had seen or heard as a man is by what happens under his window, and you moved us as Swift moved his contemporaries.

But you are not interested in the Great War; you never stood on its battle fields or walked its hospitals, and so write out of your opinions. You illustrate those opinions by a series of almost unrelated scenes, as you might in a leading article; there is no dominating character, no dominating action, neither psychological unity nor unity of action; and your great power of the past has been the creation of some unique character who dominated all about him and was himself a main impulse in some action that filled the play from beginning to end.

The mere greatness of the world war has thwarted you; it



has refused to become mere background, and obtrudes itself upon the stage as so much dead wood that will not burn with the dramatic fire. Dramatic action is a fire that must burn up everything but itself; there should be no room in a play for anything that does not belong to it; the whole history of the world must be reduced to wallpaper in front of which the characters must pose and speak.

Among the things that dramatic action must burn up are the author's opinions; while he is writing he has no business to know anything that is not a portion of that action. Do you suppose for one moment that Shakespeare educated Hamlet and King Lear by telling them what he thought and believed? As I see it, Hamlet and Lear educated Shakespeare, and I have no doubt that in the process of that education he found out that he was an altogether different man to what he thought himself, and had altogether different beliefs. A dramatist can help his characters to educate him by thinking and studying everything that gives them the language they are groping for through his hands and eyes, but the control must be theirs, and that is why the ancient philosophers thought a poet or a dramatist Daimon-possessed.

This is a hateful letter to write, or rather to dictate—I am dictating to my wife—and all the more so, because I can not advise you to amend the play. It is all too abstract, after the first act; the second act is an interesting technical experiment, but it is too long for the material; and after that there is nothing. I can imagine how you have toiled over this play. A good scenario writes itself, it puts words into the mouths of all the characters while we sleep; but a bad scenario exacts the most miserable toil. I see nothing for it but a new theme, something you have found, and no newspaper writer has ever found. What business have we with anything but the unique?

Put the dogmatism of this letter down to splenetic age, and forgive it.<sup>14</sup>

Lady Gregory also forwarded to O'Casey a letter which Yeats had written to her, which read in part:

The most considerate thing for us to do is to suggest that he withdraw the play. My letter gives an opinion, doesn't absolutely reject. He could withdraw the play "for revision" and let that be known to the Press. He should say that he himself had become dissatisfied and had written to ask it back. If he disagrees with our opinions as to its merits, he can wait a little, and offer it to some London Manager. If the London Manager accepts, then our opinion of the play won't matter to him at all. Or, on the other hand, if no Manager accepts, or if he doesn't offer it there, he can keep it by him, revising, or not revising, as he pleases. I want to get out of the difficulty of the paragraphs in the Press saying that the play has been offered to us. I have not told anyone what I think of the play, and I will get Lennox not to give his opinion. You have, perhaps, already written to Casey, but even if you have, I should like you to write making this suggestion.<sup>15</sup>

Part of O'Casey's irritation stemmed from earlier visits during the composition of the play by Robinson and Yeats, both asking him to submit his next script to the Abbey. He was working on the last act when Mr. Lennox Robinson suddenly paid a visit to his flat in South Kensington. As O'Casey inimitably and irritably phrases it:

Not to linger, he said, but just to ask about the new play. There were rumours in Dublin that the play wouldn't be given to the Abbey Theatre. The rumours aren't true? You will give the play? Oh, that will be joyful! Yeats and I were sure the rumours were false. No, I can't stay for a cup of tea. Just called because of the silly rumours in Dublin that your play would not be given to the Abbey. Mr. Robinson held out an aesthetic, tentative hand. Goodbye, Sean.

Sorry I can't stay; so glad you'll give your play to us; and off he went to the air, it seemed to Sean, of *Danny Boy*.<sup>16</sup> . . . there was a bloke called Yeats outside who wanted to see him. Before he had ended the sentence, the stately figure of the poet stepped in as if it was marching to the tune of *Old Comrades*. He would sit down only for a moment. No, wouldn't take a whiskey and soda—doctor's orders . . . He came to ask O'Casey if he intended to give his new play to the Abbey. Rumours in Dublin said O'Casey had decided to ignore the Abbey, which would be a pity. O'Casey had come to the Theatre when he had been most needed, and a refusal of the new play would cause irritation. The rumours untrue! He could assure the other Directors that the Theatre would get the play. No, he couldn't stay longer. Friends were waiting. Goodbye; and the great man stepped out as if marching to the tune of *Your Tiny Hand is Frozen*.<sup>17</sup>

On May 4, Lady Gregory noted in her Journal:

Starkie at the Abbey last night, had but just come back from Spain, says the Abbey is well known there, and great interest shown in it. He has but read a part of *The Silver Tassie*—began saying he didn't care for it, but I said he must not judge it till he has read it through. Not a word from Sean O'Casey—he may be trying to find a London producer. That would be best for us but not, I think, for him. But he may shrink from a rewriting or not accept our opinion. I am sad about it all.<sup>18</sup>

Starkie's early opinion of the play is curious in view of his later stand for the play against the other three directors. He remarked in a speech on August 16, 1938, at the Abbey Theatre festival, "The rejection of the play by the Board . . . came as a surprise to those who remembered all that it owed to the successful O'Casey plays . . . I was a di-

rector who favoured the production of the play right from the start . . ." <sup>19</sup> On May 6, Lady Gregory noted:

He [Robinson] was cross and I felt cross and Yeats was cross and spoke crossly. Anyhow we had already before dinner read a letter that grieved me and angered them from Sean O'Casey. He wrote that he had received our letters on his play, that "Lady Gregory had written in her kind way," but that he did not accept our criticisms, believing the play to be a good one, that the Abbey "is not refusing it because it is a bad play but because it is a good one," and some very ungracious words about Yeats' second letter, a kindly meant one, suggesting that to avoid saying it had been rejected he might say he had taken it back for alteration. He says the manager of a London theatre is ready to produce it at any time, and that he had already taken it to him.<sup>20</sup>

The manager was C. B. Cochran, to whom O'Casey had offered the play after he had submitted it to the Abbey. O'Casey's reaction on receiving the Yeats letters was that they were "peppered with pompous advice . . . Curse o' God on them! His anger grew at every line he read!" <sup>21</sup> The tone of O'Casey's account is half angry, flamboyant belligerence and half self-pity. He points out that his wife had just had their first child and that they were desperately depending on the play for money to tide them over the year. O'Casey seems to have thought that Yeats' criticism of the play would cause his publisher to renege and his London manager to cancel the London production. These, of course, were the two sources most likely to produce an income, and not the week's run at the Abbey. O'Casey was particularly incensed by Yeats's suggestion that he withdraw the play quietly. He wrote to Lennox Robinson:

If W. B. Yeats had known me as faintly as he thinks he knows me well, he wouldn't have wasted his time—and mine

—making such a suggestion; I am too big for this sort of mean and petty shuffling, this lousy perversion of the truth. There is going to be no damned secrecy with me surrounding the Abbey’s rejection of the play. Does he think that I would practice in my life the prevarication and wretchedness that I laugh at in my plays? <sup>22</sup>

O’Casey’s reply to Yeats read:

Dear Mr. Yeats,—There seems to me to be no reason to comment upon whether you read my play in Rapallo or in Dublin, or whether you read my play before or after reading your fellow-directors’ opinion, or whether the Abbey owed or did not owe its prosperity to me—these things do not matter, and so we’ll hang them up on the stars.

And we’ll send into exile for the present the “dogmatism and splenetic age” and have a look at the brood of opinions these have left behind them.

You say—and this is the motif throughout the intonation of your whole song—that “I am not interested in the Great War.” Now, how do you know that I am not interested in the Great War? Perhaps because I never mentioned it to you. Your statement is to me an impudently ignorant one to make, for it happens that I was and am passionately interested in the Great War. Throughout its duration I felt and talked of nothing else; brooded, wondered, and was amazed. In Dublin I talked of the great war with friends that came to see me and with friends when I went to see them. I talked of the great war and of its terrible consequences with Lady Gregory when I stayed at Coole. I have talked of the great war with Dr. Pilger, now the cancer expert in Dublin who served as a surgeon at the front. Only a week before I got your letter I talked of the great war to a surgeon here. And yet you say I am not interested in the great war. And now, will you tell me the name and address of the human being



who, having eyes to see, ears to hear and hands to handle, was not interested in the great war? I'm afraid your statement (as far as I am concerned) is not only an ignorant one, but it is a silly one too.

You say "You never stood on its battle-fields." Do you really mean that no one should or could write about or speak about a war because one has not stood on the battle-fields? Were you serious when you dictated that—really serious now? Was Shakespeare at Actium or Phillipi; was G. B. Shaw in the boats with the French, or in the forts with the British when St. Joan and Dunois made the attack that relieved Orleans? And some one, I think, wrote a poem about Tir nan nog who never took a header into the Land of Youth. And does war consist only of battle-fields?

But I have walked some of the hospital wards. I have talked and walked and smoked and sung with the blue-suited wounded men fresh from the front. I've been with the armless, the legless, the blind, the gassed, and the shell-shocked; with one with a head bored by shrapnel who had to tack east and tack west before he could reach the point he wished to get to; with one whose head rocked like a frantic moving pendulum. Did you know "Pantosser" or did you ever speak to him? Or watch his funny, terrible antics, or listen to the gurgle of his foolish thoughts? No? Ah, it's a pity you never saw or never spoke to "Pantosser." . . . And does war consist only of hospital wards and battlefields?

You say: "You illustrate these opinions by a series of almost unrelated scenes as you might in a leading article." I don't know very much about leading articles, though I may possibly have read them when I had the mind of a kid, so I don't quite get your meaning here. And do you know what you are thinking about when you talk of leading articles? Surely to God, Mr. Yeats, you don't read leading articles!

I have pondered in my heart your expression that "the history of the world must be reduced to wall-paper," and I

can find in it only the pretentious bigness of a pretentious phrase. I thank you, out of mere politeness, but I must refuse even to try to do it. That is exactly, in my opinion (there goes a cursr opinion again), what most of the Abbey dramatists are trying to do—building up, building up little worlds of wall-paper, and hiding striding life behind it all.

I'm afraid I can't make my mind mix with the sense of importance you give to “a dominating character.” God forgive me, but it does sound as if you peeked and pined for a hero in the play. Now is a dominating character more important than a play, or a play more important than a dominating character? In “The Silver Tassie” you have a unique work that dominates all the characters in the play. I remember talking to Lady Gregory about “The Plough and the Stars” before it was produced, and I remember her saying that “The Plough and the Stars” mightn't be so popular as “Juno,” because there wasn't in the play a character so dominating and all-pervading as “Juno,” yet “The Plough” is a better work than “Juno,” and, in my opinion—an important one—*“The Silver Tassie” because of, or in spite of, the lack of a dominating character, is a greater work than “The Plough and the Stars.”*<sup>23</sup> And so when I have created the very, very thing you are looking for—something unique—you shout out: “Take, oh, take this wine away, and, for God's sake, bring me a pot of small beer.”

It is all very well and very easy to say that “dramatic action must burn up the author's opinions.” The best way, and the only way, to do that is to burn up the author himself. What's the use of writing a play that's just as like a camel as a whale? And was there ever a play, worthy of the name of play, that did not contain one or two or three opinions of the author that wrote it? And the Abbey Theatre had produced plays that were packed skin-tight with the author's opinions—the plays of Shaw, for instance.

Whether Hamlet or Lear educated Shakespeare, or Shake-

speare educated Hamlet and Lear, I don't know the hell, and I don't think you know either.

Your statements about ". . . psychological unity and unity of action . . . Dramatic action is a fire that must burn up everything but itself . . . the history of the world must be reduced to wallpaper in front of which the characters must pose and speak . . . while an author is writing he has no business to know anything that isn't a part of the action . . ." are, to me, glib, glib ghosts. It seems to me they have been made, and will continue to be spoken forever and ever by professors in schools for the culture and propagation of the drama. (I was nearly saying the Gospel.) I have held these infants in my arms a thousand times and they are all the same—fat, lifeless, wrinkled things that give one a pain in his belly looking at them.

You say that after the first and second acts of "The Silver Tassie" there is . . . nothing. Really nothing? Nothing, nothing at all? Well, where there is nothing, where there is nothing—there is God . . .<sup>24</sup>

I shall be glad for the return of the script of the play and a formal note of its rejection. Best personal wishes.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps it was under Yeats' and Robinson's influence and the antagonistic tone of O'Casey's letter that Lady Gregory revised her opinion to think the play worse than her original estimate. On May 14, she noted in her Journal:

But it is sad about the *Tassie*. Arthur Shields says his brother<sup>26</sup> has read it and thinks it very fine. But reading it again it seems, after the first act, weaker than before, and I thought this especially when looking at the triumphant progress of the *Plough*, every character so clean-cut, an etching of life caught up in tragedy. In the *Tassie* the characters, equally vivid in the first act, become lay figures, lantern slides, showing the horror of war. When A. Shields told me

of his brother's opinion I would have asked "What part is there for him in it?" but didn't like to say a word.<sup>27</sup> And fresh from the *Plough* I wrote on the copy of *Three Last Plays* I sent to Sean, "with humility" as well as affection. He always gave me credit for his first success because of my words, "Your strong point is characterisation." I wish he would continue to respect those words.<sup>28</sup>

Lady Gregory was the only one of the Directors who had a strong affection for O'Casey. Indeed, one might suspect Robinson had a strong antipathy toward him. It must have been painful to Lady Gregory when O'Casey sent the entire correspondence between him and the Directors to *Æ's The Irish Statesman* for publication in its June 9 edition. Yeats was worried and threatened to sue both *Æ* and O'Casey if the letters were published, but *Æ*, although timorous, published the batch.

Starkie, the Trinity College professor who was the government representative on the Abbey Board, published a belated report of his opinion which read:

In *The Silver Tassie* the characters seem to come from a shadow world; they are not beings of flesh and blood . . . I feel that the author had a great idea at the back of his mind and fugitive symbols presented themselves to him but he was not able to create, as he did before, living men and women. The play seems to me to decline act by act from the beginning . . . In spite of all this I feel that the author is experimenting in a new world of drama; for this reason I feel strongly that the Abbey Theatre should produce the play. Sean O'Casey has given us so many fine works that we ought to leave the final decision with the audience that has laughed and wept with him. He is groping after a new drama outside the conventional stage; at any moment he may make a new discovery.<sup>29</sup>

On June 6, when the letters had appeared in *The Observer*, Lady Gregory wrote plaintively:

It was great ill luck, L. R.<sup>30</sup> and Starkie abroad, Yeats just back and falling on it, with new energy of criticism, and my excess of consideration, thinking that O'Casey ought to see his opinion before the proofs were out of his hands and believing he would make alterations. And I am sad. Just bad stars.<sup>31</sup>

And on June 10:

He [O'Casey] had stayed here and I looked on him and treated him as a friend I could speak or write openly to. He had accepted our criticism in other cases, had rewritten one of the scenes of *The Plough and the Stars* at Yeats' suggestion, and I did not think he would have refused to consider this. In spite of his letters I asked Yeats and Lennox Robinson, when we went up to the office on one of the last nights of *The Plough and the Stars*, if we might consider putting it on. Yeats was inclined to it, but L. R. said "No. It is a bad play."<sup>32</sup>

The dispute had received so much notoriety that it attracted Shaw, who wrote to Lady Gregory:

Why do you and W. B. Y. treat O'Casey as a baby? Starkie was right, you should have done the play anyhow. Sean is now *hors concours*. It is literally a hell of a play; but it will clearly force its way on to the stage and Yeats should have submitted to it as a calamity imposed on him by the Act of God, if he could not welcome it as another *Juno*. Besides, he was extraordinarily wrong about it on the facts. The first act is not a bit realistic; it is deliberately fantastic chanted poetry. This is intensified to a climax in the second act. Then



comes a ruthless return for the last two acts to the fiercest ironic realism. But that is so like Yeats. Give him a job with which you feel sure he will play Bunthorne and we will astonish you with his unique cleverness and subtlety. Give him one that any second-rater could manage with credit and as likely as not he will make an appalling mess of it. He has certainly fallen in up to the neck over O'C. But this is not a very nice letter, is it? Consequently the very last letter I want to send you. So I will stop before I become intolerable. G. B. S.<sup>33</sup>

Shaw also wrote to O'Casey, but the phrase "a hell of a play" this time seems to have an affirmative or at least an anomalous connotation:

My dear Sean, what a hell of a play! I wonder how it will hit the public. Of course the Abbey should have produced it, as Starkie rightly says—whether it liked it or not. But the people who knew your uncle when you were a child (so to speak) always want to correct your exercises; and this was what disabled the usually competent Yeats and Lady Gregory. Still it is surprising they fired so very wide, considering their usual marksmanship . . .

If Yeats had said "It's too savage; I can't stand it," he would have been in order . . . Yeats himself, with all his extraordinary cleverness and subtlety, which comes out when you give him up as a hopeless fool, and (in this case) deserts him when you expect him to be equal to the occasion, is not a man of this world; and when you hurl an enormous chunk of it at him, he dodges it, small blame to him. However, we can talk over it when we meet. Cheerio, Titan.—G. B. S.<sup>34</sup>

The Shaws and the O'Caseys had tea over the problem, and all agreed, except O'Casey, that he should submit any further letters to Yeats to Shaw for approval. O'Casey's attitude was that

He had no wish to have his letters edited, even by such a man as Shaw. Yeats had hit as hard as he could, and Sean wasn't inclined to hold his punches. He had refused the counsel of Uncle Yeats, and he had no intention of taking the counsel of Auntie Shaw.<sup>35</sup>

The whole affair was unfortunate and even rather tragic. It, of course, was necessary for O'Casey to break away from the apron strings not only of Uncle Yeats, but of Granny Gregory and, most certainly, of third cousin Robinson. Shaw was right when he said that O'Casey had come into his own. He was no longer a student, but a distinguished dramatist who had contributed two masterpieces to modern literature. And it must be remembered that Yeats, although a master, was not a master in O'Casey's field, and that even though Yeats did produce some fine and beautiful plays like *Purgatory* and *The Words upon the Window-Pane*, his talent was essentially lyric rather than dramatic. He had never, except as a translator, essayed a play longer than the one-act form. Most of his plays are somewhat debilitated by lyricism. Yeats was probably right, however, when he said that dramatic fire must consume the author's opinions, and in Act II of *The Silver Tassie* there is little fire and much opinion. Also, when Yeats said that O'Casey was not "interested" in the war, it seems rather obvious that he meant that O'Casey had not the emotionally involved experience of it that he had had of the Easter Rebellion. O'Casey's rebuttal not only construes Yeats' term too narrowly, but also it indicates a falsity at the bottom of much Expressionist work—that opinion and intellectual affirmation are a substitute for emotion and reality and character.

Lady Gregory, although she had done a large number of polished and pleasant plays, and even one or two like *The Gaol Gate* that approach tragedy, was never at home in

the three-act form. Nor can it be argued that either she or Yeats produced any play of the stature of *The Plough and the Stars*.

Robinson was a competent second-rate dramatist whose reputation as the white hope of the Abbey had already begun to tarnish before O'Casey appeared on the scene. Starkie had never written a play, and the other directors considered him as rather an albatross and, in fact, did not send him the script for consideration until after they had rejected it.

As it was Yeats who finally swung the pendulum against *The Silver Tassie*, it might be profitable to suggest the premises he used. They are premises alien to O'Casey's intentions, and even premises which have been occasionally assailed as containing many critical blind spots.

Yeats' biographer, Joseph W. Hone, quotes from Yeats' manuscript book on the subject of the poet's "distaste for O'Casey's approach to certain special subjects, which he considered spiritually unprofitable":

It would seem from its failure in London that we were right, upon the other hand Mr. Shaw's and Mr. Augustus John's admiration suggest that it was at least better than we thought it, and yet I am certain that if any of our other dramatists sent us a similar play we would reject it. We were biased, we are biased by the Irish Salamis. The war as Casey has conceived it is an equivalent for those primary qualities brought down by Berkeley's secret society, it stands outside the characters, it is not part of their expression, it is that very attempt denounced by Mallarme to build as if with brick and mortar with the pages of a book. The English critics feel differently. To them a theme that "bulks largely in the news" gives dignity to human nature, even raises it to international importance. We on the other hand are certain that nothing can give dignity to human nature but the character

and energy of its expression. We do not even ask that it shall have dignity so long as it can burn away all that is not itself.<sup>36</sup>

Yeats was probably wrong in condemning the play because it had a theme that "bulks largely in the news" or in calling it a "leading article" sort of play. It is not the nature of the theme, but its abstract presentation, that hurts the play. Hone then continues:

The thought in this bears a close resemblance to the much criticised section of the Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, where Yeats explains his exclusion of the work of Wilfred Owen and of other English war poets, on the ground that "When man was withdrawn into the quicksilver at the back of the mirror no great event becomes luminous to the mind."<sup>37</sup>

The merits of the play are discussed earlier, and it seems necessary only to suggest here that O'Casey was a better judge of his play than the members of the Abbey Directorate. O'Casey was certainly a better judge than the here esthetically *hors de combat* Yeats. Robinson's critical intelligence, exemplified in the years when he managed the Abbey and selected its plays, would not seem particularly acute. Starkie's judgment and Shaw's judgment, even though those gentlemen were not in the inner circle, hit closest to the mark. Lady Gregory repeatedly changed her mind about the play. On October 1929, she noted in her Journal, after seeing the London performance of the play:

I am convinced we ought to have taken it and done our best to put it on, and make such cuts of the bad language as he would allow. I have written to Yeats and sent O'Casey a

copy of my words, “I believe we should have taken it—we could not have done the chanted scene so well, it was very moving, but we could have done the other acts better.” For it was a grief to me to see the mixed company in these—the hero “Harry”—a solid Englishman—the kitchen scene played by miscellaneous actors old and new. Barry Fitzgerald in an exaggerated farcical situation, under a bed and in a bed. It all pained me. I have written to him copying the sentence I had written to Yeats . . . But my mind goes back to *The Tassie*—we ought not to have rejected it. We should have held out against Lennox Robinson that last evening the order to return it was given.<sup>38</sup>

O’Casey, writing in *The Irish Statesman*, summed up his feelings about the rejection by saying:

It was rejected because W. B. Yeats and Lennox Robinson couldn’t see or wouldn’t see, that the play was worthy of production by the Abbey Theatre; that was the ethical reason for its rejection. The concern for O’Casey’s reputation vanishes with its tail down when we remember that the replies to the Abbey’s criticisms showed that O’Casey was prepared to risk his reputation, which was all his own business and none of theirs, to which they refused to respond by producing the play to show whether their opinions were right or wrong.<sup>39</sup>

There was one more discussion with Yeats over the matter. In Ireland, O’Casey was invited to Yeats’ home, and during the conversation the poet suddenly said:

—O’Casey, he said, bending towards him, you’ve succeeded in your last play, *Within the Gates*. The coordination of mood, dialogue, and technique there is a success, where, I think, it is a failure in your *The Silver Tassie*.



Oh, thought Sean, forcing his thoughts onto what Yeats had said so suddenly, *The Silver Tassie is still in his mind*. He's excusing the rejection of one play by his praise of another. Aloud, he said, Do you really believe, Mr. Yeats, that *Within the Gates* is a successful achievement?

—I do, he said, emphatically; I believe it to be a most successful achievement in your newer manner.

—I wish to God I could believe it too! came from Sean in a burst of frank fervency; and he was amused at the signs of hesitation, surprise, and doubt that flooded into the poet's expressive face. Sean learned then that Yeats wanted the Abbey to do *Within the Gates*. He objected. He wouldn't refuse, and showed the poet that the Abbey stage would never accommodate the play's action. Besides, the play was clumsy in parts, and, some day, he would try to amend it. He made it clear that never again would he send a play to the Abbey; but that the Abbey was always welcome to do any play of his they wished to do. He suggested *The Silver Tassie*, a play far easier to put on the Abbey stage; that Yeats could have the other, if he insisted; but that *The Silver Tassie* was a far easier venture. The poet was silent for a few moments, and then said he would put the question before the Directorate.<sup>40</sup>

"Later," Joseph Hone comments, "the Abbey Directors accepted the verdict of London, and *The Silver Tassie* was produced in all its revolting integrity." Two consequences of importance sprang from the controversy. One was the effect on the Abbey Theatre, and one was the effect on O'Casey's later development as a displaced playwright. Kavanagh comments shrewdly:

Yeats' decision was possibly his greatest mistake in tactics. Granted that *The Silver Tassie* was a bad play, this was no

excuse for its rejection. O'Casey had earned the right to have a bad play produced. Yeats adopted the presumptuous attitude of acting as guardian of O'Casey's reputation. There might have been greater justification for this if the theatre at the time was swamped with fine poetic plays demanding production. Actually, there was a severe shortage of good plays.<sup>41</sup> Yeats had temporarily adopted the attitude that only himself and Lady Gregory had the right to use the Abbey Theatre for experimental purposes.

. . . This much, however, can be said as one views it from a distance of twenty years, that the rejection of *The Silver Tassie* marked a weakening in the organizing faculty of Yeats' mind and a turning point in the Abbey Theatre's career as it moved down the hill to its ultimate collapse with the death of Yeats in 1939.<sup>42</sup>

For years, the critical cliché about O'Casey's work was that it began to disintegrate when he left Dublin, that, in Lady Gregory's words about Henry James, "he might have found more sap and substance among his own people." Eric Bentley comes closer to, although not on, the mark when he writes, "I am not sure that Mr. O'Casey's later plays are as good as his earlier ones; I am sure they would be better than they are had Yeats and Agate and the rest kept the playwright in the theatre."<sup>43</sup>

The rupture with the Abbey had another effect; it was reflected in the playwright's occasionally greatly increased spleen. To absolve him, Bentley's sympathetic comment is apt although its last sentence is a bit strong:

Not understanding the crucial nature of this moment when Yeats could have saved O'Casey for the theatre by accepting the *Tassie*, we are likely to misread large portions of the autobiography as megalomania. Actually, we should be less

surprised at Mr. O'Casey's continual return to the crisis of *The Silver Tassie* than at the fact that his attitude to Yeats even after it was one of filial love.<sup>44</sup>

One of O'Casey's many tributes to Yeats was a letter that he wrote to *The New York Times* in 1935, in which he wrote: "Mr. Yeats will never be anything less than a great poet and a great man."

# Appendix:

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See, for instance, an article by David Krause in *The Virginia Quarterly* Winter Issue, 1958, on *The Silver Tassie*.
- <sup>2</sup> This is not quite the full truth as many statements in the autobiographies indicate.
- <sup>3</sup> Peter Kavanagh, *The Story of the Abbey Theatre* (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1950), p. 138.
- <sup>4</sup> Italics mine.
- <sup>5</sup> *Lady Gregory's Journals: 1916-1930*, Ed., Lennox Robinson (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947), p. 104.
- <sup>6</sup> Kavanagh, p. 139
- <sup>7</sup> Italics mine.
- <sup>8</sup> Lady Gregory, pp. 104-105.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- <sup>10</sup> A reference to the Hugh Lane picture controversy. Lane was a nephew of Lady Gregory killed on the *Titanic*. He had meant to leave a valuable collection of pictures to Ireland. By a formality they were and still are retained in London.
- <sup>11</sup> Walter Starkie, representative of the government on the Abbey Board of Directors.
- <sup>12</sup> Lady Gregory, pp. 105-106.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- <sup>14</sup> The Letters of W. B. Yeats, Ed., Allan Wade (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954), pp. 740-742.
- <sup>15</sup> Sean O'Casey, *Rose and Crown*, pp. 36-37.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-34.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.
- <sup>18</sup> Lady Gregory, p. 106.
- <sup>19</sup> Lennox Robinson, ed., *The Irish Theatre* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1939), p. 169.
- <sup>20</sup> Lady Gregory, p. 107.
- <sup>21</sup> *Rose and Crown*, p. 36.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Irish Statesman*, X (1928), pp. 268-271.

- <sup>23</sup> Italics mine.
- <sup>24</sup> "Where There is Nothing, There is a God"—a line from Yeats.
- <sup>25</sup> *The Irish Statesman*, X (1928), pp. 268-271.
- <sup>26</sup> Barry Fitzgerald.
- <sup>27</sup> Fitzgerald played Sylvester Heegan in the London production.
- <sup>28</sup> Lady Gregory, pp. 107-108. O'Casey became irked at those words after they had been constantly invoked to suggest he could do nothing but character.
- <sup>29</sup> Kavanagh, p. 141. O'Casey's umbrage at the Directors carried over to the friendly Starkie, however. See his reply in *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. CIV, pp. 399-402 to an earlier article on O'Casey by Starkie in that same volume, pp. 225-236.
- <sup>30</sup> Lennox Robinson.
- <sup>31</sup> Lady Gregory, pp. 108-109.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.
- <sup>34</sup> *Rose and Crown*, p. 45.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- <sup>36</sup> Joseph W. Hone, *W. B. Yeats* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1943).
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> Lady Gregory, pp. 123-124.
- <sup>39</sup> Sean O'Casey, "Y. O. and The Silver Tassie," *The Irish Statesman*, X (1928), p. 430.
- <sup>40</sup> *Rose and Crown*, pp. 49-50.
- <sup>41</sup> The 1928 season at the Abbey offered a Shakespeare, an Ibsen, and a Quintero brothers. Brinsley Macnamara, T. C. Murray, Gerald Brosnan, Kathleen O'Brennan, and Robinson among the local greats were represented.
- <sup>42</sup> Kavanagh, p. 143.
- <sup>43</sup> Eric Bentley, *The Dramatic Event*, p. 45.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.



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